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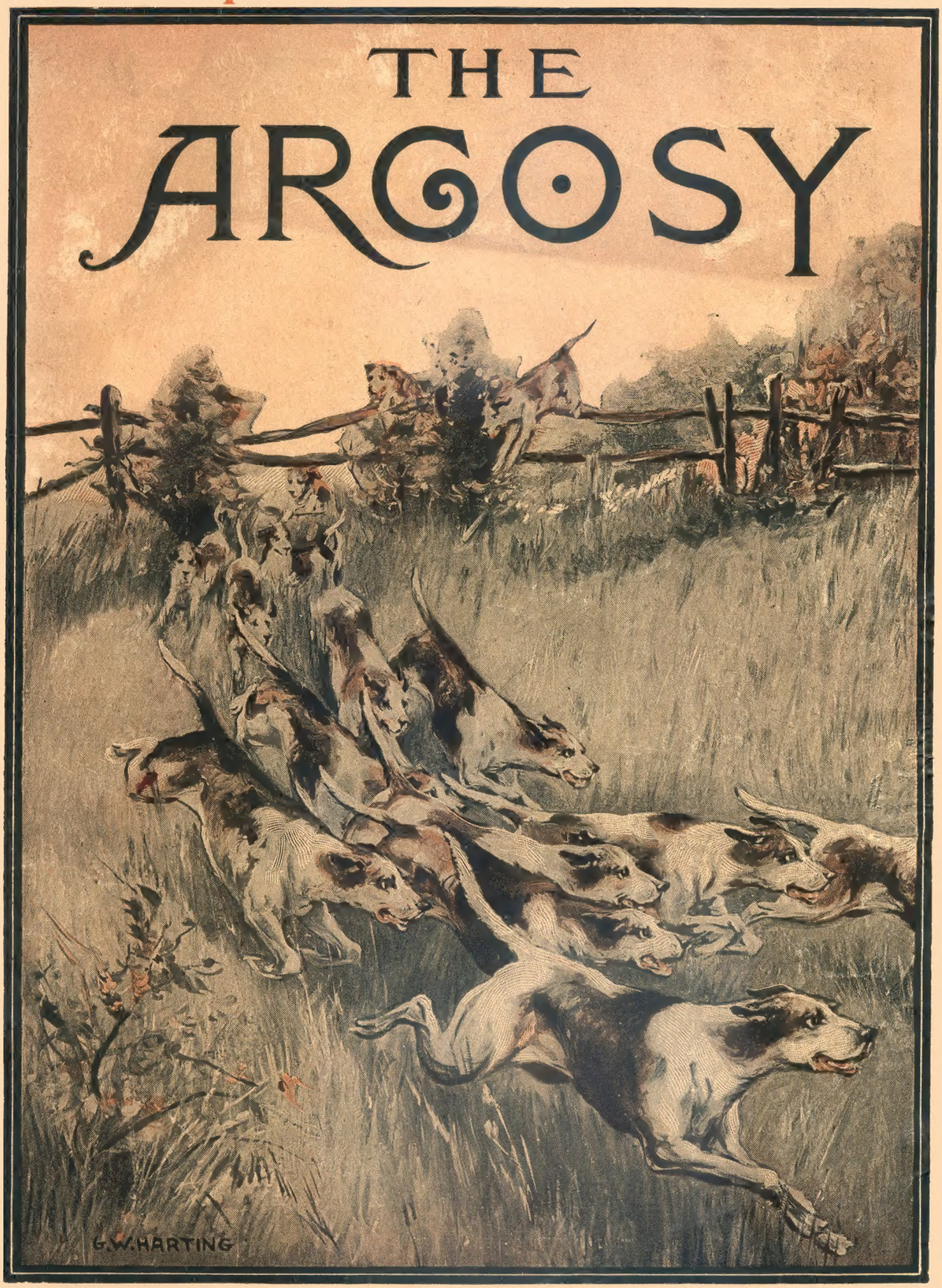

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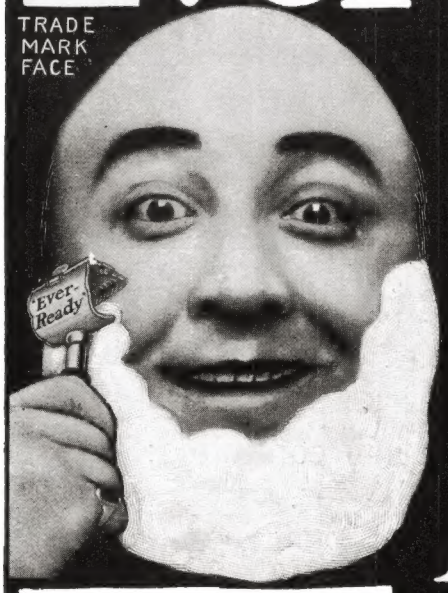

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The Argosy for November

Two Complete Novels

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A DRESS-SUIT AFFAIR.....H. E. TWINELLS..... 751

HIS STUMBLING-BLOCK..... FORREST HALSEY..... 754

WIRES AWRY..... .....FRITZ KROG..... 758

FOR THE HONOR OF BILLY.....BURKE JENKINS..... 762

"THE EYES OF 7,700"

is the name of one of the two Complete Novels in the December Argosy, the peculiarity about the eyes in question being not so unusual as the man who noticed them supposed. The other Complete Novel bears the odd title of "NOT INTERESTED," which surely will not be the state of mind in the reader who follows the fortunes of its two heroes. The New Serial is "A BLOW TO LIBERTY," revolving about a man who is in hard luck, due neither to excessive patriotism nor the fracturing of his country's laws. Of the December Short Stories, "THEIR CHRISTMAS PANIC" savors of the season, "THE SOCIETY BEHAVIOR OF ELI STRONG" is calculated to amaze you as well as the heroine, while "THE FRUITS OF FLIGHT" must surely prove a novelty in these days, as it has nothing whatever to do with aeroplanes.

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175 Fifth Avenue, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E.C., London

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President, RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary. CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer.

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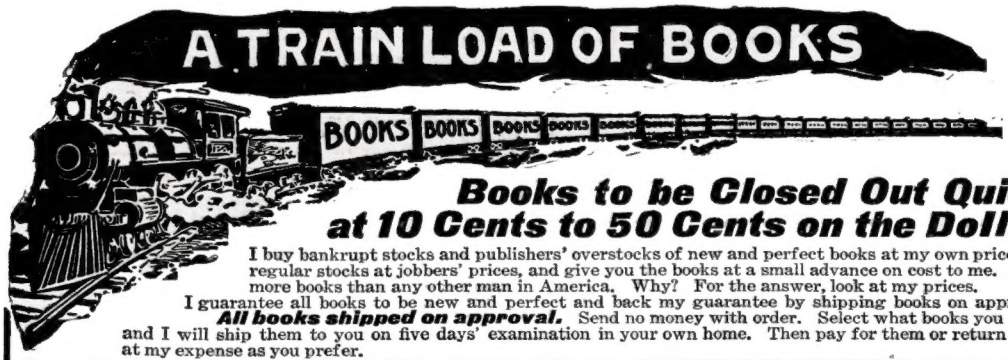

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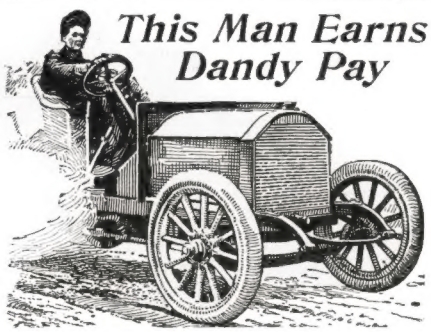

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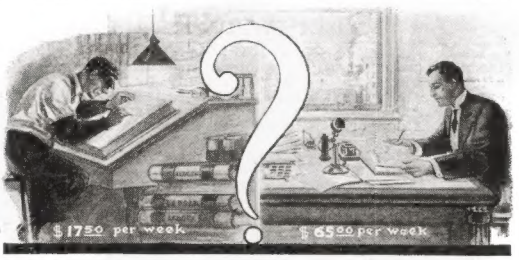

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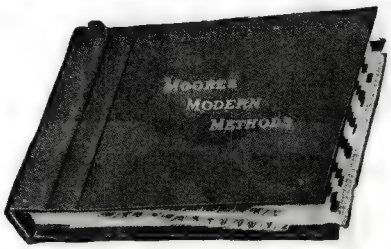

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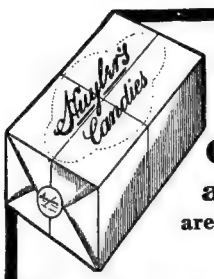

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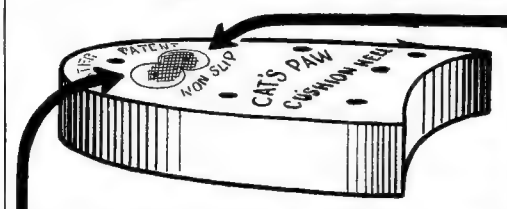

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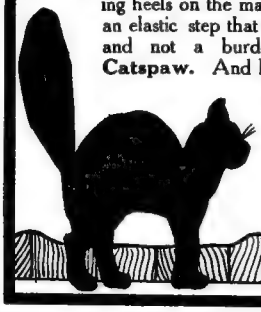

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Send your name and address and send this coupon.

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What could be a fairer test than that?

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This soup I know,
Makes youngsters grow
But do I look like that?

21 kinds 10c a can

Tomato	Mulligatawny	Celery	Pea
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Just add hot water, bring to a boil, and serve.

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JOSEPH CAMPBELL COMPANY, Camden N J

Look for the red-and-white label

THE ARGOSY

Vol. LXI NOVEMBER, 1909. No. 4

DONE BROWN

By SEWARD W. HOPKINS,

Author of "Trouble in Bunches," "The Secret on an Island," "By Bullet Persuasion," etc.

A Central American fiasco, with an account of certain startling expedients set on foot by the man who was done to recover that which he valued most from the wreck.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

A BAD STATE OF AFFAIRS.

THE doors were locked. There was nobody in their offices. That much seemed to be certain, and yet it was middle forenoon, just the busiest hours of the day.

I stood perplexed, and not a little angry.

The name was still on the door.

"The West Coast Mining and Improving Company."

Yes, the name was there, just as it had been before I left on a European trip which had for its combined objects a little pleasure, a return to health and vigor, and largely the financing of the company itself.

I had had some pleasure, had fully regained my health, but somehow all my persuasive eloquence had failed to attract the money of European capitalists into the treasury of the West Coast Mining and Improving Company.

And here I was, the heaviest stockholder in the company, just returned, staring at locked doors.

Still in a condition of foggy perplexity, I sought the superintendent of the building.

"Does the West Coast Company still have their offices in this building?" I asked him.

"No, sir. And, what's more, I don't believe that company has an office anywhere."

"Why, what was the matter?"

"I don't know. At first they were behind in the rent, and when they were jogged about it, they all at once gave up the place. Something wrong, I guess."

"I suppose you have the keys?"

"Certainly, sir. I hold the keys of all vacant offices."

"My name is Ford. I am the heaviest investor and stockholder in the company. Have you any objections to opening the office? I have just returned from Europe, and would like to get a line on things if I can."

"I'll open up for you. You see, the last to leave was the girl."

"Miss Morrow, the stenographer? I suppose they left her to wind up some correspondence."

"Perhaps so."

He did open the door. I saw a suite of rooms almost bare of furniture. The floors were littered with papers as though a cyclone had struck the city registrar's office. There were old checks, clippings of newspapers, correspondence from all parts of the world.

The drawers of the two desks were empty.

"This looks like flight," I said to the superintendent. "Not a very orderly way to leave things."

"It *was* a flight, sir; but I didn't wish to say anything. I thought I'd let you find it out yourself."

I stood amid the ruins, thinking hard.

Just how deeply I was involved financially I didn't know.

"That's enough for now," I finally announced. "I must find Smythe, if I can."

"Others have been looking for him, sir."

I had no doubt of that. I had been the one to recommend Miss Morrow for the position of stenographer, and I knew where she lived. I hurried to her house.

As the young woman had not as yet succeeded in finding other employment, she was at home.

"Mr. Ford!" she exclaimed in some surprise.

"Exactly so, Miss Morrow. I arrived yesterday on the Lusitania."

"But I didn't think *you'd* return to New York. Not *now*, anyway. All the others have gone."

"I found the offices closed, and the superintendent of the building opened them. Things inside looked as though Smythe had cut it suddenly."

"He did. Everything was going to smash."

"I can't understand. Where *is* Smythe?"

"I don't know. I suppose he went to Canada."

"And Jenkinson?"

"He's gone, too."

"And Everingham?"

"Oh, he went first."

"'M! What was the last report from Innors?"

"Why, the last report was that Mr. Innors was dying. He contracted fever in the swamps while superintending the railroad work, and I suppose he's dead by this time."

I stood and stared at her.

"Of course," she said, "I understand your anxiety. It is about Miss Innors."

"*Miss* Innors! Surely Innors wasn't such an idiot as to take *her* down there."

"Why, yes. He seemed thoroughly infatuated with the plan. And Mrs. Innors was willing enough to go. He said the company had some good, comfortable houses built, and the school was about finished, and the mills, and the railroad was about ready to begin operations; so there would be work for all, and no reason why Estalona should not be a very prosperous place."

"I thought the same thing myself. Something must have gone wrong. Was there any hint that Everingham, the treasurer, made way with the funds?"

"It *was* hinted at. But, of course, I did not know the inside facts. I know that one day Mr. Wakler came in, and there was some loud talking, and then the excitement of everybody getting away commenced. They told me to stay and wind up the correspondence, as no one could hurt me."

"And I suppose nobody gave me a thought. It made no difference if somebody *did* hurt me."

"I did think of you; but what good did that do? I could do nothing."

"Of course not. I understand that. And the delightful part of the matter is I don't think I can do anything myself. I suppose by this time there are attachments and judgments and all other kinds of legal claws on us."

"The car company sent a representative. And the company that sold the steam-shovel."

"Where is Jake Wakler now?"

"I don't know. But he can't be very far away. There was some trouble about his money."

"Didn't he get paid?"

"I don't think anybody got paid."

For a moment my mind stood still under the weight of the sudden blow. I knew that the incompetence or rascality of the officers of the company had about ruined me, but that was not so bad as the knowledge that Nellie Innors was down on the west coast of Honduras, perhaps alone with her mother, and perhaps in all sorts of trouble, distress, and danger.

I bade Miss Morrow good-by, thanked her for the information she had given me, and hurried at once to see my lawyer. Together, we went over the business of the company, the form of its charter, the form of the concession from the Honduran government, and finally he came to the conclusion that I was personally responsible for the full indebtedness of the company.

"I'll tell you what to do," he said. "I don't think any legal steps have yet been taken. Make application to have the company put in the hands of a receiver, petition to have yourself, or me,

or somebody you can trust, made the receiver, and then hustle and see what you can save from the wreck."

I took his advice, and in three days he, Mr. Elwood Drake, as straight and clean a lawyer as there was in New York, was made receiver of the West Coast Mining and Improving Company, and for a time I was free from financial worry.

But what I did worry about was Nellie Innors.

CHAPTER II.

WORSE STILL.

I HAD been in love with Nellie Innors for a full year. And, so far as my personality went, I was accepted readily enough by Innors and his wife as a suitor for Nellie's hand; but they demurred on the ground that she was too young to think of love and marriage.

Well, she *was* young. But youth is a trouble that time overcomes for everybody; and I had looked forward to the day of my return to New York as the beginning of a happy courtship.

I was about four years older than Nellie, comparatively wealthy, and had no entanglements that needed explaining or settling before I could settle down to a joyous life with the girl I loved.

And now I arrive home to find my air-castle shattered and myself ruined, with Nellie away and in danger or trouble or both.

My sensations were far from pleasing as I accompanied Drake to the offices of the company, introduced him to the superintendent as the receiver, and entered the place again to take another rueful look at the ruins.

"They certainly left débris enough," remarked Drake. "But I doubt if we can realize anything on this."

"They've cleaned everything out, I guess," I replied. "They've left two desks and a half-dozen chairs. I wonder how they overlooked so much."

"Clearly a matter of oversight," said Drake grimly, as he kicked away a lot of rubbish and sat down at a desk. "Now look here, Ford. I'm going to pull you through this without the loss of a cent."

"Bully boy, if you do," I observed. "But it'll be a tough job."

"Oh, I don't know. I think I can stave off the creditors until you get an inventory of the company's property. You'll have to go to Estalona."

"I intended to go, anyway. I was in a hurry for you to take hold so I could get away. I am anxious about Nellie Innors. Innors had no business to drag her down in that wilderness."

"You must remember that Innors was busy transforming the wilderness into a settled and wealth-producing country. He probably had a firm belief in the future of Estalona, and wanted, perhaps, the honor of being the first settler to take his family there."

"That's all right about his honors. But it wasn't a fair deal for the girl."

"Hardly; I'll agree with you there."

There was a heavy tread, and with a shuffling gait a rough-bearded, hugely built man entered the office.

"So! You've opened up at last, eh? It's about time I got— Oh, Mr. Ford! When did you get home?"

"Oh, a few days ago, Wakler," I answered. "I'm glad you came in. I want to know how things are going at Estalona."

"Going! The deuce! They've gone."

"What do you mean? Tell us what the conditions are down there. This is Mr. Drake, the receiver of the company. I am left to bear the brunt of this thing alone. The manager and engineer had no trouble with the government, had they?"

"No, not with the government exactly. The government would be all right if it had a chance. But, you see, we were not in very close touch *with* the government. The west coast is sort of an orphan down there, and it's hard work to get from Estalona to Tegucigalpa. We had to rely on our own resources pretty much, and they didn't amount to a whole lot."

"But why did you leave?"

"Why did I leave! What the deuce! Everybody else left. Why, the Zambos got up on stilts and raised merry hob. They looted the company's store, got drunk on American whisky, stole the ammunition, shot up the railroad, and what with them and the Indians—one

certain tribe—and the fever, there was Hades to pay."

"But what about Innors? Why didn't you help him and his family home?"

"I don't know anything about Innors. The last I heard from him was he was sick with the fever. I couldn't do anything. He's a prisoner."

"A prisoner!"

"Yes. I don't just know the rights of it. But Innors had some kind of a row with the governor of the department, or one of his deputies, or somebody else. He either hit him, or shot him, I don't know which. Only thing I know is that he was in prison and sentenced to be shot, and they were waiting for him to recover from the fever so they could carry out the sentence."

"But what about the American consul?"

"Didn't I just tell you it was almost impossible to get word to Tegucigalpa? The forests are full of Zambos. They've gone mad over some new order from the government. I don't know what it was."

"What about Mrs. Innors and Nellie?"

"They were well enough, last I knew, but there was no use trying to get them away. They won't leave until Innors is free—or dead—or something."

I looked at Drake. He was eagerly taking in every word.

"I've got to get off at once," I declared. "Think of what may be happening to those two women now."

"Oh," said Wakler easily, "they won't suffer none. There's a rich dago down there wants to marry Nellie, and another wants to marry Mrs. Innors as soon as she's a widow."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Drake. "They'll kill Innors to make her a widow. Get off as soon as possible, Ford. You'll want papers, eh?"

"A copy of the concession will be enough. I shall be on our own ground."

"True."

"I want my money," said Wakler. "I ain't been paid in six months. I've been coaxing that old tub around the bay on wood fire for half a year, and if I had a square meal I'd have to shoot or catch it myself."

"Where's the boat now?" I asked.

"In the mud on Caros Island."

"Is that part of the concession?"

"No, it isn't much of anything. It's a little island in Fonseca Bay."

"Now see here, Wakler," said Drake, and he spoke somewhat sternly and to the point, "there is something you must understand. I have been appointed receiver only to-day. There is not one penny in sight with which to pay you. But this must be done. Ford is going to the concession to take an inventory, so that I can realize as much as possible, and legitimate wages earned shall be the first claim. Now, Ford has never seen the place, and you have. I want you to return with him, guide him to Estalona, and when I get in shape to pay anything, I'll double what you have earned."

"All right, if that's the only way," said Wakler in a surly manner. "But I'm broke."

"I'll advance you a little," I said. "Which is the quickest way to get there?"

"Well, you can do this. You can go to Galveston and take a steamship there for Truxillo or Patuca, and cross on mules, or you can stop at Moloacan and go across Mexico by rail to Salina Cruz, and take a steamship there for Amalpa, or you can go by rail to San Diego, California, and start from there in a steamer that stops at Mazatlan, San Blas, Manzanillo, Acapulco, and Salina Cruz. I don't know which is the quickest."

"Better take the Galveston-Salina Cruz route, Ford," said Drake. "And get off at once."

There was no need to tell me to hurry. My steamer trunk was not unpacked. I was all ready to begin another journey.

CHAPTER III.

A SCENE OF DESOLATION.

"THERE, sir, is Estalona. Behold!"

Wakler made a sweep with his arm at the worst scene of desolation I ever looked at.

I sat astride a horse, and Wakler rode a big mule. We were dressed for rough traveling, and we had had our fill of it.

There is no necessity for describing the journey from New York. Most of the way it was comfortable enough, and has either been experienced or so often described that I will spare the reader a repetition of what he already knows. The thing is that at last, after some hardship, we arrived at Estalona.

Estalona, did I say?

Let me at least describe that. No one else will ever write it up.

On the right, as we looked eastward, there was a low mountain range thickly wooded, between us and the Choluteca River. On the left dense forests of pine. Straight before us stretched several miles of clearing, where the way had been made for the railroad.

The railroad was there. Part of the way the rails seemed to be about ten feet apart, while in spots this distance narrowed to about five. No locomotive or car that was ever built could go a quarter mile without leaving the track. In spots one rail was buried in the sand that had been piled on it by some recent tornado.

There was a shack alongside the track, over the door of which hung a huge painted sign that read "Estalona," and this railway station of the twentieth century had once been furnished with glass windows of which now not a single pane remained entire.

It had never been painted, and added a quite unnecessary touch of dismal failure to what was altogether too apparent without it.

Here and there was a native hut, made of bamboo trunks lashed together for the sides, with a roof of plaited leaves.

About three hundred feet from where we sat on our steeds a locomotive lay on its sides, while a short distance farther on another had left the track and lay with its cow-catcher buried in the sand.

My heart sank as I took in all the sickening details. I understood everything now.

It was an easy matter to make an inventory. The assets, as I saw them, were about a dollar and a half, or whatever I could get for old junk.

I was ruined. As the only responsible stockholder in an unlimited corporation I was compelled, if I wished to be honest, and I did, to shoulder the entire debt my colleagues had piled up for me.

Drake's work as receiver was an easy one. All he had to do was to tabulate the debts of the company and tell me to draw my check for the amount. I wondered if I had enough to pay all, even after I had converted all my securities into cash.

"What do you think of it?" asked Wakler, with a leer.

"I can't understand," I said. "Innors was a competent man."

"But Innors didn't have his own way. Innors insisted on having the management. He held that nobody but an American having an interest in the company should be in charge. But the wise guys, the grafters in New York, knowing what *they* were doing, tried to get themselves into the good graces of the government, and appointed Rafael Magnuz general manager."

"What sort of man is this Magnuz?" I asked.

"Man! Man, did you say? Oh, he's a good-looking animal. And he fell in love with Nellie Innors, and Nellie would have none of him; and Innors stormed about his presumption, and they quarreled. Magnuz interfered with the work laid out by Innors, and finally Innors was taken with the fever. But he kept on, and, to make things certain, Magnuz put up a job on him."

"What kind of a job?"

"Well, this fellow Magnuz had a friend like himself, and he appointed him superintendent. Mind you, there wasn't enough managing to keep even Magnuz busy, but he divides the arduous labors with one Fonseca. Notice, the name is the same as that of the bay. Now, you can take your choice whether this Fonseca is of some importance, and the bay named after his family, or a confounded rascal not entitled to the name at all. At any rate, he is a swaggering, bragging bully, and wasn't here two days before he began to make violent love to Mrs. Innors.

"You know, Mrs. Innors is a fine-looking woman. Well, that was the situation as I told you in New York. Innors in prison, waiting till he is well enough to be shot, and Mrs. Innors and Nellie—somewhere. I don't know where."

"But where did they live when Innors was at liberty?"

"In that largest hut over there."

He pointed as he spoke, and the blood curdled inside of me as I thought of sweet, dainty Nellie Innors living in a hog-pen like that. There was no sign of comfort. I dismounted and went inside, which was easy enough, for the door was open and sagged on a broken hinge.

If there had been furniture it had been carried away.

"This is hell," I said, trying to remain calm.

I knew that whether I was a ruined man or not I had work to do before I left the west coast. I had already reached a determination that Nellie Innors would go with me, or I would not go alive.

"Don't you know where Mrs. Innors and Nellie went?" I asked Wakler.

"No, not for sure. I know they couldn't stay here."

"I should say not. But I don't see why you don't know more about them."

"Well, you must understand, Mr. Ford, I wasn't here. My work wasn't in Estalona. I was captain of the boat—the Puffer. My work was all in the bay or up and down the Choluteca."

"But what did they use the boat for?"

"Well, mostly for pleasure excursions and fishing and entertaining the governor and other big guns when they came to inspect the works and not progress."

"Progress! Did you say progress? Where is it?"

"Nowhere. But it would have been progress all right if they had let Innors alone."

"What was the last word you had with Innors? What did he think?"

"He was too sick to think much. But, of course, you know the concession is forfeited."

"Forfeited?"

"Sure. The terms and conditions were distinctly stated. A certain amount of improving must be done each year. A certain amount of mining must be done, on which output a certain percentage must be paid into the treasury of Honduras. But nothing had been done.

"Instead of improvements that will pay the government for the concession, they have cut down and ruined several million feet of the best pine; and where is it? Where is the school they boasted about? There it is—that miserable hut with half a roof. No teacher was ever engaged, and nobody ever intended to engage one. In any case, where are the scholars?

"Where is the sawmill that was to employ a hundred white settlers? The logs were hauled for it, and Magnuz sold the lot to the governor of the department. The governor was an innocent party. Magnuz told him the company wasn't going to build the sawmill, and I reckon he told the truth for once."

"And you say your boat is a wreck?"

"No, she isn't a wreck. But she lies nose in the sand on Caros Island."

"Where is that?"

"In Fonseca Bay, about ten miles from Tigre Island."

"Can't you get her off?"

"Not single-handed. I'm pilot and captain. I can't be engineer as well."

"Where is the engineer?"

"Oh, he's dead. His name was Jakeson. He got into a muss at Choluteca with a native about a game of cards, and after a few shots were passed around I had no engineer."

"Now, where is the prison in which Innors is kept?"

"In Choluteca."

"Then, it is altogether likely that Mrs. Innors and Nellie are there in order to be near him."

"I don't know. I doubt it, though. In the first place, it wouldn't do them any good, for they don't let you see foreign prisoners here. And, in the second place, they wouldn't be likely to put themselves in the way of Magnuz and Fonseca."

"True. But we must go to Choluteca and begin our searching there."

"But what about the inventory?"

"I've taken it. The result is nothing. Come along."

CHAPTER IV.

PLAIN WORDS.

As Wakler and I rode into Choluteca I was not impressed with the size, the beauty or the cleanliness of the place.

The streets were narrow and crooked. Every gutter was an open drain. Although situated on the bank of the river, with a natural incline toward it, there

wasn't, as I learned afterward, a foot of sewer in the place.

In the streets were children, either half naked or entirely so, playing with dirty and hungry-looking dogs that seemed half wild.

Everybody had dogs, but nobody owned any. They were just there. That's all.

The houses were low, mostly of one story, some built of dirty adobe, and some of the same material as the huts in the forlorn city of Estalona.

Here and there was a church built of stone. The churches were the best buildings in the place.

The population seemed to be composed almost entirely of dark-skinned people. Some were decidedly of the original Indian type, while the shades ranged all the way from totally black to a dirty white. The Zambos were in the majority.

Here and there we saw a house rather more pretentious than those around it.

"There lives the man who can tell you all about Innors—if he will," said Wakler, pointing to a two-story adobe dwelling.

"And who is he?"

"The *alcalde*. The judge that sentenced Innors to be shot."

"We'll have a talk with him."

"He may be at court."

"Then we'll go to court."

"But be careful. We may find ourselves in the same fix as Innors, and we have no fever to delay matters. I have no wish to stand up against a wall to be filled full of lead."

I turned to him quickly.

"Do you think—" I began.

"Well? Do I think? Sometimes I do. Why not finish?"

"A thought just struck me that if the spirit of justice is as much over-ripe as to be rotten, as you seem to intimate, Mrs. Innors and Nellie may be in prison too."

"I thought the same thing, but didn't like to say it."

I gnashed my teeth in rage. When I thought of Nellie—the sweetest, tenderest girl I ever knew—in a filthy, ill-kept dungeon, browbeaten by jailers, half starved or fed on indescribable and inedible stuff, my hands involuntarily clenched; and had I the *alcalde* before me, and knowledge that Nellie Innors *was* in prison, all the level-headed common sense I ever possessed would not have prevented me giving him one good punch.

I had started my already tired nag toward the *alcalde's* house; and Wakler's mule, which never got tired, lay back his ears and followed. We passed sorry-looking soldiers on the way, who eyed us with suspicion and no outward expression of friendliness.

Fortunately the *alcalde* was at home. I felt some relief when I discovered that he was a white man.

"To what excellent good fortune, *señor,*" he asked, "do I owe the pleasure of this visit?"

"The pleasure, *señor,* is all mine," I said, speaking the best Spanish I knew, which certainly was nothing of which I could boast. "My name is Ford. I am an American, and much interested in a fellow countryman who, I am given to understand, is now incarcerated in the prison at Choluteca, ill, and only waiting till he has recovered health to be shot."

I saw the *alcalde* start.

"I assume, *señor,*" he said, "that you refer to the Americano Innors. He is, as you say, in the prison. But the sentence, I am compelled to say, was just."

"I have not inveighed against your justice, *señor.* Before coming to see you I made inquiries, and am quite sure you are a just and even-tempered man. What I wish to ask is this: Had my fellow countryman a lawyer?"

"A lawyer? Certainly. Of course."

"Not an American lawyer?"

"There is none here."

"But the American Consul? Was he represented at the trial?"

"He was notified. No person, so far as I am aware, came from the consulate?"

"Still, the trial must have been a fair one, having taken place under your jurisdiction. Now, I have a favor to ask."

"Ask it, *señor.*"

"I would like to have your permission—an order from you—to enable me to see my fellow American, Innors."

The *alcalde* shook his head.

"That, I regret very much, is impossible. As *alcalde* it is my duty to sit in judgment and listen to the evidence in a trial. Having pronounced sentence, I

cannot do anything further. The matter at once passes out of my hands—out of my jurisdiction. There is no person with power to give permission for you to visit a prisoner except the governor, and, I am sorry to say, he is not in Choluteca. He left for a trip through the remote sections of the department, and nobody knows just where he is."

"When will he return?" I asked.

"Nothing short of a month, I am sure."

"And what about Innors? How is his health now? When do you think he will be shot?"

"Next Monday."

Cold chills ran through me. I knew the man was lying. Yet what was there for me to do? My anger was stronger than my caution.

"Let me tell you, *señor alcalde,*" I said, "that beyond the northern border of Mexico there is a powerful country to which Señor Innors and I owe allegiance. If Innors is shot without an American being given the privilege of seeing him, a gun-boat will arrive and blow this miserable town of yours off the map."

The *alcalde's* face went black with fury. Wakler's was white with fear.

"Have a care, *señor,* how you address me," said the *alcalde,* rising. Already two persons are in prison for making that same threat."

"Two persons?"

"Yes; and two persons who are nearer the Americano Innors, and have more interest in his welfare than you have."

"You mean—"

"I mean his wife and daughter."

"Great Heaven! You have not placed those two delicate women in your filthy prison?"

"It is not a filthy prison. But they are there."

"*Señor,*" I said, "through the rascality of some of my own countrymen, and some of yours, I am a ruined man. Otherwise I would purchase the liberty of Innors and his wife and daughter."

"You think, then, that money would effect their release?"

"I am sure of it."

"You are wrong. The *señorita* already has it in her power to walk from the prison a free woman."

"On what condition?"

"That she become the wife of Señor Magnuz."

"She never will."

"Then your money, if you had any, would be useless."

"I thank you, at least, for granting me the interview," I said, holding myself in by a tremendous effort. "But let me repeat, it would be wise to postpone the execution of Innors until the governor returns."

"I have already told you I have no power. The governor himself gave the commands before he left."

Raging within like a wild animal, I bowed myself out.

Without a word Wakler and I mounted our steeds and rode a short distance from the *alcalde's* house.

"Well," said Wakler, "what are you going to do? Without money, with mountains and armed enemies between you and the consulate, where are you at? We two cannot storm the prison of Choluteca."

"By Heaven, Wakler," I said, "I'll die trying. The governor gave the command to have Innors shot. He'll give me an order to set him free."

"How will you make him do that?" gasped Wakler.

"With a pistol at his head. Let's get something to eat."

Wakler's face was still white as we hunted for a café.

CHAPTER V.

NEWS FROM THE INSIDE.

THE café we finally chose was scarcely more inviting than others we had passed, but there seemed to be a touch about it a little more Americanized than the others. We entered and picked out a table near a window.

We were already being observed with curiosity, and almost every person who passed the place stopped a moment to look at the two *Americanos* eating.

It did not surprise me any to see among the other interested ones, a priest. There was nothing extraordinary about him, but his eyes seemed, as he gazed at me, to be trying to convey a message.

He did not enter the café, but passed

and repassed the window several times, each time looking in with the same peculiar expression. I could not understand it.

Whatever it was, there was no animosity shown. It was rather a friendly glance.

He finally disappeared, and I went on with my meal in the belief that I had seen the last of him.

Having finished, I paid the bill, and Wakler mounted his mule and I my horse, and we started to return to the desolation known as Estalona.

As we rode out of Choluteca, toward the only bridge by which we could cross the river, a new American structure, I saw ahead a priest with bowed head riding slowly along on a very small burro. I could not tell whether he was reading or telling his beads.

As we, with our faster animals, caught up with him, he slipped something under his cassock and turned toward me.

"I have the honor to greet you, sir," he said in excellent English.

"The pleasure is mutual, if you feel any, *padre*," I replied.

"You are of that company that tried to establish an American city and failed."

"I am the money end of it, and it has made an end of my money," I said. "I came here not knowing what I would find, and I find nothing."

"Certainly not," he answered. "It would never be permitted. If your company had taken land on the eastern coast, it might have been a different story. But here—they are jealous even of the wind that blows from the north. You see, this is the gold coast. While they scarcely work any mines themselves, they hate the northern men who do. Every stumbling block was put in your way."

"But my own people were dishonest. I alone must bear the brunt."

"I can understand—you bear it because you are an honest man. You have heard of Diogenes?"

"Yes; he spent his time searching for an honest man."

"I have been a priest long enough to appreciate the hopelessness of his search. Yet I feel that you are one. I am in despair."

"You? In despair? How can that be? I had an idea that the church was well protected here."

"It is. The trouble is not with the church, nor concerning the church, nor even concerning myself. Still I am in despair."

"Is it a matter in which I can be of any assistance?"

"It is for that I waited to see you."

"You wanted to see me, then. I thought you had something to say when I saw you through the café window."

"I could not speak there. I dare not even be seen speaking to you anywhere. I am the chaplain of the Choluteca prison."

"Ah! Then you have seen Innors, the engineer, and his wife and daughter."

"I have seen them and spoken with them. They are in dreadful suspense. The man himself is almost well, but is feigning a continued illness to postpone his execution as long as possible in the hope that the American consul will come to his aid. The ladies are growing white and ill, though I must say, in justice, they are not treated cruelly. There is a reason for this. Magnuz and Fonseca, two of the worst rogues we have, are in love with them. Horrible! Think of it! Hastening the execution of a prisoner in order to compel his wife to marry a man she can only detest."

"But Mrs. Innors will not consent."

He made a deprecating gesture.

"I said the ladies were not cruelly treated. You will understand that this is because the supreme test has not yet taken place. Innors is alive. But let the cracking of the rifles sound his deathknell and you will see a change. A woman's will is strong, but when she is starved, it breaks. A woman can stand a great amount of ill-treatment, but she cannot stand the sight of her own child suffering. Mrs. Innors will give way to save her daughter from misery."

"But they would be in misery if they married."

"Certainly they would. But it would be a misery of the soul. It can be borne better than physical torture."

"Would they dare—"

"You do not know these men. I am, as I told you, in despair about the matter. Listen. You wonder why I am so interested. I received my education in

one of your colleges. To be explicit, I graduated from a college in what is called Fordham, in the city of New York. I learned to love your country and your people. A greater hospitality and love of justice I have never seen than I saw there.

"As soon as I met Innors in the prison, and heard his story, I knew there was more trouble to come. And it did come. Weeping, inconsolable, his wife and daughter were brought in as prisoners—for what? For telling the *alcalde* that the United States would protect the husband and father. Monstrous! Yet that was not, of course, the true reason. The true reason was that Magnuz and Fonseca wanted to get them in their power.

"Miss Nellie told me of you. The girl sincerely and fondly loves you. Be assured of that. What? I have proof. Had I not learned that you were here, I would have sent this to you by post."

This remarkable and friendly *padre* then drew from beneath his cassock a sealed letter, which he handed to me.

"Read it," he said.

"But," I exclaimed, "this is addressed to me at the address of the West Coast Company in New York. How did you know my name was Ford?"

"Love is a true artist," he replied. "Miss Innors described you to me fully, and I was sure I made no mistake."

I opened the letter. It was short, and rather hysterical, reading:

> DEAR BOB:
>
> Papa is in prison condemned to be shot. Mama and I are also in prison because we dared remonstrate with the judge who sentenced papa. There are two men here named Magnuz and Fonseca, who ruined the works at Estalona, and now wish to force mama and me into a marriage with them. It is too horrible to think of. Mama has a fainting spell every little while. I am sending this by a good priest, who graduated from a New York college.
>
> Can't you in some way manage to rescue us? I shall go mad if papa and mama both die. I shall die too. Help us for God's sake.

"Read it," I said to the *padre*.

"I have already read it. I read it before it was sealed."

"Tell me, my excellent friend, after receiving my thanks for what you have already done, what you can about the governor and his method of travel. About where would he be now? How many men has he with him?"

"You must remember," replied the *padre*, "that this is not the real governor of the department. That personage was compelled to go to Spain for his health, and a deputy, or acting governor, was appointed for the interim. He is a Zambo. As such, he does not need a large escort, for the majority of the population are Zambos.

"He is traveling in the saddle from town to town, ostensibly studying improvements and the need of them. As a matter of fact, the trip is nothing more than a prolonged debauch. I suppose he has a dozen men with him."

"Would an order from this acting governor be obeyed at the prison?"

"Assuredly. He has the same power and authority as the real governor."

"Then I will bring an order to release the prisoner, or I will let my bones dry in the jungle. Will you carry my message to Mrs. Innors and Nellie?"

"This very day."

He clasped my hand warmly, uttered a blessing, and in a moment was riding slowly back toward Choluteca with his head bent and a book or rosary in his hands.

"Well!" exclaimed Wakler. "That's a man for you!"

"We'll sleep at Estalona to-night, feed and rest our horses, and start to-morrow to meet this Zambo," I said, and we rode on.

CHAPTER VI.

OFF ON A DESPERATE MISSION.

PROBABLY I was tired out. Perhaps the fact that I slept in the house that was once the home of Nellie Innors had something to do with it. At any rate, I slept with remarkable soundness. When I did awake, the morning sun was streaming in through the broken windows, and with it came a most appetizing savor.

I walked out to where Wakler was working over a fire.

"Why didn't you sleep a little longer?" he grumbled. "I've a fine breakfast for you."

"And I a fine appetite for it," I told him. "But where did you get all this?"

Over an oil-stove that he had fished up from some part of the ruined town, a pot of aromatic coffee was simmering. And on a big roasting-pan he showed me a haunch of venison.

"Better eat some bananas to start on," "The rolls are not quite ready."

"The what?" I cried. "Is there a New York bakery at hand? Where did you get all this stuff?"

Wakler grinned.

"New York isn't the whole world," he replied, "and honesty isn't always the best policy. Part of this breakfast I stole."

"Oh, come now!" I said. "Why, that coffee smells like home."

"Not at all. When you drink this coffee in New York, home smells like Honduras. You see, I've been up a few hours. We've got to eat, and if the confounded country has gobbled all our money, it isn't going to starve us to death—not while Jake Wakler is around and able to do things. You know—but then you don't. I'll tell you.

"About a quarter of a mile from here is a family. When I say family on the west coast, it amounts almost to the same thing as saying tribe. About a quarter of a mile from here, through the pines, there lives a family of Quichas. They are the aboriginals hereabouts, and have been reduced to poverty through the greed of the Zambos, who have usurped a little power. Naturally, they hate the Zambos.

"These people have all they can do to exist, being forbidden to own land or to shoot game in the forests owned by the government. Nevertheless, they cultivate land and shoot game.

"Old Quinchincha, the head of this family, which is really a dozen families, told me where I could shoot a deer, and I shot it. Then I rambled aimlessly into a big plantation, where there was a coffee-roasting plant, and helped myself when nobody was looking. The rolls—I spoke jestingly, of course—are simply biscuit made from the powdered *cassava*. And, let me tell you, it's good."

"I suppose you'll spring creamery butter on me next," I said.

"No. Butter is out of the question. However, here is a sweet palm sirup that adds much to the taste."

"Did you steal that, too?"

"No. Old Quinchincha gave me that. It's good for the coffee, too, although there is sugar-cane, if you want it."

Surprised and gratified at the splendid repast Wakler had prepared, I made a good meal. Then, while I smoked, Wakler began packing a lot of food in a bag made of dried yellow grass, like a shapeless basket.

"You see," he said, "we've got a tough road before us. Once we get off the concession, which isn't a concession any longer, I don't know the way. Old Quinchincha is going with us as guide."

I stared.

"Well," I said, "you certainly have been making use of your time. You take as much interest in Innors and his family as I do."

Wakler gave me a peculiar look, and then pointed his forefinger at me much as though it was a gun.

"Listen," he said in a cold, matter-of-fact tone, "I don't care a six-inch spike about the Innors family. But I was hired at a salary of three hundred dollars a month to run the old tub called the Puffer. Well, I haven't been paid in six months, and eighteen hundred dollars look as big as the wall of China to me now. And the sooner we get this Zambo acting governor in our clutches, and you are free to go back to New York and settle up with Drake, the receiver, the sooner I'll get my money."

While he was busy packing the hamper, for that was about what the grass bag amounted to, old Quinchincha appeared.

The head of the Quicha family was none too prepossessing. If I had met him on a dark night without the pleasure of an acquaintance, I should have run.

He was no taller than five feet three inches. He seemed very old. His leather-colored face was seamed and wrinkled. He had not, from a cursory observation, smiled in fifty years. His black, beady eyes studied me keenly.

He was dressed in some sort of skin of rough, untanned material, wore boots that were incontestibly of United States make, and carried a rifle that certainly had been taken from somebody who had at one time or another been in the employ of the West Coast Company.

On the whole, Quinchincha was a most picturesque old vagabond and rascal.

He bestrode a burro just about big enough to suit Quinchincha's own build, and when he rode into the area of desolation called Estalona, I could not help smiling.

"I am here," he grunted in Spanish. "We will pursue the Zambo governor. I know him. Old Quinchincha knows."

He certainly looked as if he did, and I invited him to sit down and partake of some breakfast. He did not hesitate.

"Listen!" he said impressively, with his mouth full of deer-meat. "This Zambo is named Carlos Savanilla."

"That's a good name—sounds all right, anyway," I said.

"He is a Zambo."

"Most of the people are," I said, more with the idea of making a reply than that my observation amounted to anything.

"He is a murderer and a thief."

"You know that?" I asked.

"Do I know? Time is too short to tell you all I know. This Savanilla gets drunk."

"I've heard that called a good man's fault," I said.

"No. In this case, it is a bad man's virtue. We will see."

When the old head of a family had finished a prodigious breakfast, which was the second he had had that morning, we started. Quinchincha led, on his diminutive burro. Then I followed on my horse, and next came Wakler on his big mule, the best of the three mounts.

Wakler had the grass bag containing food slung across the back of his saddle. Old Quinchincha had a grass bag too, but at the time we started I did not know what it contained.

Now, this old Quicha knew his business. He knew the trails that led through jungles that would have been impenetrable to me. He could speak to the people in Spanish, to the Quichas in their native tongue, and occasionally he startled me with an English word or phrase I would not be expecting.

"Our first stop," he said, "will be at San Marco. There are Quichas there. I shall learn much."

CHAPTER VII.

A BOLD MOVE.

SAN MARCO was merely a collection of bamboo huts. It was situated right on the bank of the Choluteca River, and the inhabitants lived mostly by fishing.

There were boats—rude, misshapen things, that seemed incapable of remaining upright when carrying two men—moored along the shore. The odor of fish was everywhere.

There wasn't a white man in the place. There were Zambos, negroes, and Quichas.

Quinchincha led us to a hut a little worse in looks than the others, and from its squalid interior another short, leather-faced old Indian made his appearance. The two conversed in their own tongue a moment.

"You see," said Quinchincha, turning to me, "it is as I said. Savanilla has passed this way. He has promised that a railroad shall be built that will have a station at this village. Look! Is San Marco not a fine place for a railway station? The trains will carry fish to the coast. They will be shipped to places where fish are as easily caught as here. Oh, yes. Savanilla is a great governor. He promises things that will be no good when they come."

"Where did he go from here?" I asked.

"It was said that he was going to Santa Maria."

"How far is that?"

"Half a day's ride. My burro is not very fast. And you can't go faster than I."

This was true. Without the guidance of the old Quicha, I would have become hopelessly lost in the jungle.

Having had a lunch at San Marco, we journeyed on toward Santa Maria. Here the old chief found another Quicha who told him that Savanilla and his

staff had passed that way, and promised that a steamboat-landing was to be built and a line of steamboats should run from Santa Maria to Tigre Island, there to connect with the Pacific coastwise steamships.

"But," I said, "what has brought forth all these promises? San Marco gets a railroad, and Santa Maria a line of steamers. What moves the Zambo acting governor to promise these things?"

"To make the people happy. You see," explained Quinchincha, "my people were ready to work for your company. The men around Savanilla ruined your company. Now they must do something to pacify the Quichas, who are enraged because they can no longer earn money."

I could understand this readily enough. With the invaluable aid of Quinchincha, we found accommodations for the night, and in the morning, after a good breakfast, we started on.

The next stop was Jacinto, where we learned that the governor had stayed for several days. We were gaining on him because we hurried and he did not, and we went in a straight line along the river, whereas he made short trips aside to visit remote villages. What he promised the people in such places I never knew.

The population of Jacinto was excited because they had been promised a fortress and a regiment to keep out foreign invaders, though previous to the Zambo visitation nobody had ever thought of an invasion.

The last stage of the journey was from Jacinto to Gracia, high among the Black Tiger Mountains, and the healthiest place we had yet visited. The governor was here. The entire town had turned out in best bib and tucker to do honor to the Zambo who had been elevated to such high rank, although his governorship seemed to be aware that it was only temporary.

And the governor was drunk.

The town of Gracia boasted an inn, at which we found room for ourselves and food for our three animals. We sauntered about the crooked streets, and were gazed at the same as we had been at other places.

"There is the Zambo," said Quinchincha quietly, as we were standing under an awning made from banana leaves.

The acting governor was a tall man. His face was heavy and gross, his eyes small and black, and there wasn't a feature in his entire physiognomy that spoke of honesty. I felt that any means were justifiable in bringing such a man to terms.

He saw Wakler and me, and came in an uncertain, staggering manner toward us. I gave Wakler the signal to keep quiet and let me do the talking.

"Who are you?" asked the Zambo in Spanish. "You are *Americanos*. What do you want?"

"We have followed your excellency," I replied, "to ask for the privilege of extracting gold from these mountain streams. We will pay you one-half what we get out."

His black eyes sparkled.

"Go ahead, then," he said.

"But I must have your permission in writing. I know it is dangerous to try such a thing here without obtaining official authority, and your name is all powerful."

He bowed his acknowledgment of the compliment. His thick lips smiled.

"Write? Well, I will give you the permission in writing. But you must pay me for that at once."

"I will," I said. "Come to my room."

He started to follow, and four or five of his men came after.

"Come alone," I said. "I have not told you all. The prize is half yours, anyway."

"True. Remain here," he said to his official staff, as dirty a lot of ragamuffins as I had ever seen. "I will permit you to know what is done."

We went to the second floor, which was the top one, and into my room. It was a dingy little place, but it had two bamboo chairs and a mahogany table that would have been worth a large amount of money in New York.

As soon as the Zambo, Wakler, and Quinchincha were in the room, I locked the door. Savanilla turned to me suspiciously. I pointed a forty-five caliber automatic revolver at his head.

"Make a sound," I said, "and you are a dead man. I want a paper signed by you, but not for the purpose of digging gold. You have ruined the company of which I seem to be the only honest member, and you have helped ruin me. You have imprisoned one of my countrymen and his wife and daughter. I want you to sign an order to the *alcalde,* and the *alcaid* of the prison at Choluteca, to release Innors, his wife, and his daughter."

His black eyes opened as wide as they could, and he looked with ugly consternation into the muzzle of my revolver.

"Disobey me," I said, "and I'll put eight bullets into you before your men can break down that door."

He gasped.

"Wakler," I said, "get out paper and pen and ink. The governor is in a generous mood. He will oblige."

"You lie!" said Savanilla. "I will have you shot."

"We'll take care of that part later," I retorted. "Now, sign that order as I told you."

Still he hesitated.

"Savanilla," I said, "I am a desperate man. You have the girl I love in that prison, and I'm going to get her out, and her father too. What have you to gain by keeping them there and permitting Innors to be shot? You are a Zambo. What do such men as Magnuz, Fonseca, and the *alcalde* of Choluteca care for you? They would shoot you as readily as they would me."

"I am governor."

"No; just now I am. Write as I dictate. You know the names; write to the *alcalde* and the *alcaid* as follows:

"'Release, upon presentation of this order, the American Innors, his wife and daughter.' Got that? Now sign your name."

Hesitating and cursing, he did sign, and I folded the paper and put it in my pocket.

"Now," I said, "bind this fellow, stuff something in his mouth, and we'll hurry back to Choluteca. Our work is about done."

Wakler grinned, though he was pale with fright, and Quinchincha gurgled his pleasure.

In five minutes the acting governor of Choluteca was a live mummy, and just as helpless as a dead one.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOO LATE.

"WELL," said Wakler, as he and Quinchincha and I rode leisurely away from the inn at Gracia, "for a fellow who has not lived a life of adventure, you are the most adventurous individual I've ever seen. I've jabbed that old hulk of a Puffer round here with my heart in my mouth, expecting to go feed the alligators any minute, but I'll be hanged if I'd dare do what you've done."

"You see, Wakler," I answered, "I've got a girl in prison, and I'm going to get her out. It makes a difference. If I had only myself to think of, I'd run away from a cow."

Old Quinchincha chuckled.

"Anyhow," said Wakler, "so far so good. What are your further plans?"

"First, to get a move on. This slow and easy business was all right while we were in Gracia. But now, come on."

The horse I rode, though the larger of the three animals, was the most worn. Quinchincha's burro was somewhat jaded, while Wakler's big mule seemed ready for any kind of a picnic, so long as it had plenty of grub in it.

We beat them all into a gallop until we had almost killed my horse, and then, imagining that pursuit—if there was one—would not be very rapid, we slowed down to an easy jog. Of course, we made better time than when outward bound, because we did not stop at any village except for rest and refreshments. We had no inquiries to make.

"I suppose we'll go straight to the prison," said Wakler, as we approached Choluteca. "The sooner the better, eh?"

"Well, as to that," I replied, "I've been planning a little on the side as we came along. I'm not going to lose any chances. I'm not going to place all our dependence on the obedience that may be shown the order of Savanilla. Suppose the real governor returns?"

"Surely the acts of his deputy would be upheld?"

"Possibly. But I'm going to play a safe game. Now, this is what I've thought: suppose you did succeed in getting the Puffer off the mud—would she float?"

"She might—for a while."

"Now, I'll tell you what to do. I'll manage the prison business, somehow. It won't do any good, even if you are with me, if the thing falls through. No use your being shot. You can help me more outside. Quinchincha has — how many men at his command?"

"One hundred," grunted the old Quicha.

"Very well. I am not planning a revolution. Get as many men and strong boats as you can; hire a tug, if there is such a thing; or get to Amalpa and hire a coasting steamer to come and pull the tub out of the mud. See how much she is injured, and patch it up. Keep Quinchincha with you until you hear from me."

"And what will you do?"

"I shall, of course, go to the prison and present Savanilla's order to the *alcaid*. If the order is at once recognized and obeyed, I shall walk out with Innors, his wife, and Nellie."

"But you don't seem to be overconfident."

"There are Magnuz and Fonseca to be reckoned with."

"That's so. Well, Quinch, it's up to you and me to float the sieve. Think we can do it?"

"Can pull it out of the mud," said the Quicha with a grin.

In the public square of Choluteca I parted from them, and Wakler, with apprehensions of coming trouble, insisted on shaking hands, with a provisional good-by.

Alone I rode to the prison.

The jail of Choluteca certainly was not an imposing affair. Like almost all Central American prisons, it was rectangular in shape, and went some of them one better by having a tower at each corner that ran up two or three stories higher than the main portion.

On three sides it was surrounded by a wall, which began at the front towers and extended a considerable distance the same as the front, then running parallel with the sides far to the rear, making on each side and at the back a large enclosure.

The soldiers that guarded the prison were stationed at the main entrance, where the officer in command had a little office. The guard was armed, but did not do sentry duty. Most of them were gambling.

When I dismounted at the main entrance, a dozen sprang toward me and demanded my business.

"I have an order from Governor Savanilla to the *alcaid*," I said.

I was conducted at once to the officer in charge, and after I had shown him the order, he escorted me himself to the *alcaid*, or governor of the prison.

The *alcaid* received the order, read it about half a dozen times, frowned at first, and then seemed to fall off into a dream.

"I do not know what Señors Magnuz and Fonseca will say to this," he said.

"But is Savanilla not higher in authority than they?" I asked.

I had feared this very thing.

"Yes—yes— Oh, *señor*, I shall obey the governor's command. I have a family. I have no wish to be shot. I will release the prisoners in your care. After that, you must take care of yourselves."

"Well, that is all I've asked you to do, and all the governor has commanded," I said.

There was treachery in the air. I smelled it.

"Enter here," he said.

He led me into a large, ill-furnished room, which was the prison office. I sat down. He disappeared, and soon reappeared with Innors. But, Heavens! It was not the Innors I had known. He was wasted, pallid, weak.

"Great Heavens, Ford!" he cried. "Is it you who has worked this miracle? How is my wife? And Nellie?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen them. They'll be here in a minute. The *alcaid* is after them now."

"Ford! Ford!" he moaned in anguish. "You don't mean that my wife and Nellie are *here* in this hell?"

"Yes— Hush— Be cheerful. Here they come."

For a moment, when the two women entered, I thought Ford would collapse.

But, as his wife rushed to him with a glad cry, I clasped Nellie in my arms, and did not hear the greeting between the others.

"Bob! Bob!" cried Nellie, and her head went down on my breast and she burst into tears.

Great sobs shook her lithe frame, and I thought her heart would pound itself through her ribs.

At last, however, I managed to quiet her, and turned my attention to the other two.

"Rest a moment," I said. "We are very fortunate. The governor was in a generous mood, and gave an order for your release. As soon as you are ready to start, we will proceed to Amalpa. I think we can get some kind of a ship there; if not at Amalpa, we will go on to La Union."

"Ah, let us start," said Mrs. Innors. "We can go slowly. At any cost, let us get away as soon as possible from this hateful place."

She had risen. I had helped Innors to his feet. I had turned to Nellie to tell her we were ready.

Suddenly there was a great turmoil outside. Loud and angry voices. Curses and blood-curdling threats. The clanking of scabbards on the stone floor. Then the door was thrown open.

"Where are they? Where is *he*—the vile *Americano* who held me at a pistol's point? Ah, carrion! I'll show you now."

It was Savanilla. Behind him came the *alcaid,* a dozen soldiers, and the governor's staff.

Innors sank back with a moan. Mrs. Innors fainted. Nellie turned to me with a white and terrified face.

"He tied me! He filled my mouth with vile stuff!" roared the exasperated governor. "Had not one of my staff been suspicious, these pigs of *Americanos* would have got away. Take these three back to their dungeons. And this fellow—pig that he is—put him in one of the worst. He shall be shot with the other. Obey!"

I tried to speak, but there was no use. And struggling would merely have resulted in my death, leaving Nellie and her parents with no one to act.

I submitted, and was half led and half dragged to a dungeon. My heart was heavy. A moment more, and we would have been safe.

CHAPTER IX.

A LINK WITH HELP.

I HAD heard Savanilla say that I was to be put in the worst dungeon. So far as I could see, the order had been strictly obeyed.

The hole they gave me was about six feet long, four feet wide, and just high enough for me to touch the top.

It was as bare of furniture as I was of hope that moment. The floor was damp and unclean, the air foul.

When I say that rage welled up within me, it reads as if I said I laughed with glee. In all the lexicons I ever saw, there are no words that could adequately express my emotions.

I imagined Nellie and Mrs. Innors in such a place. They may have had better light and air, but I knew their sufferings must be most acute. As for Innors, I looked upon him as already dead.

But the more I raged the more determined I was to make a fight for my life at least. A fight! What chance had I to make a fight? But it was impossible for me to lie supinely down in that filth and wait for the intelligent officials to get ready to shoot me.

I remembered that Innors was not to be shot until he was well enough. I could not exactly reason the thing out, but supposed there was some accursed diabolism about it. So I resolved to become sick when anybody came for me.

I had been stripped of everything, so shooting was out of the question.

I went all around the cell, examining every inch of it, but to no purpose. There was not the sign of a crack that indicated a loose stone. The decay of age had not weakened the walls.

The first person who opened the door of my cell was an imposing-looking official, with a sword as long as himself. He found me huddled in a heap in a corner, where I had thrown myself when I heard the bolt.

"Prisoner, rise," he commanded.

I merely groaned. He came over to me and gave me a kick.

My first impulse was to get up and punch his head. But I could not kill him, and he could kill me. So I groaned again.

"*Señor,*" I moaned, "I am very ill. I think I am dying."

"You must not die. You are to be shot."

"What is the difference, *señor,* since I will die anyway?"

"But—it is the governor's orders that you be shot, not that you die in here."

"But, *señor,* listen. I cannot help it if I die. Is there no priest?"

The happy remembrance of the *padre* who had brought me Nellie's note suddenly came to me.

"Oh, priest! Well, I know there is a priest."

"And a medico?"

"That is a different thing. If you are dying, you may have a priest."

"I will thank you, *señor.*"

Grumbling something to himself, he went out, and when I heard the door bang shut and the bolt shoot back into its socket, I sat up.

That was a happy thought. I wondered if the good *padre* would help me as he was willing to help Nellie and her parents. But if he was, his good-nature would need to be stretched farther than it was in their case.

At first the most natural thought came to me to communicate, through the *padre,* with the American consul. But Wakler had told me communication was difficult, and nobody had responded to the appeal Innors had made. The message had undoubtedly been intercepted, and would be in my case.

In some way or other, I must do the trick myself. My head buzzed as I thought of this plan and the other, all of which seemed good till I struck up against the grim wall of impossibility.

I could appeal to Washington, and by the time the message had reached there I would be dead.

The door of the cell was opened again, and I huddled on the floor and moaned.

"Pretend no more, son," said the gentle voice of the *padre.* "It is I."

I turned, and saw his kindly face looking down at me. I got on my feet.

"They told me you were ill and wished to see me," he said. "I knew that a robust man of your country does not get ill so easily. I knew that you wished to see me to ask questions. You wish to know of your friends."

"In the first place—yes, *padre.* How are they?"

"Well, Señor Innors has completely collapsed. He is now as ill as he ever was."

"Then the execution is again delayed?"

"Yes. He will not be shot until his health is sufficiently restored."

"Explain that to me, *padre.* A man is near death, and they are determined to kill him, yet do not until he is well."

"The reason is clear. When a man is very ill with the accursed fever we have here, he is in abject misery. He wishes to die. To shoot him then would be merely to give him relief; to end his sufferings. That is not punishment. They punish a man—vent their hatred on him—by shooting him when he is well, in the vigor of health, and the desire to live is strong within him. Thus does the small mind reason.

"There are, however, humane reasons why this should be so, for only a well man can fight for justice and his rights. We will not go into a long dissertation. It is enough that the thing is so."

"True, *padre.* And how are the ladies?"

"Sad, of course. Mrs. Innors faints frequently, and weeps, but the *señorita* seems strong now that you are here. She seems to feel that somehow you will succeed. Yet I confess I do not see how."

"When am I to be shot?"

"With Innors."

"And that depends on his recovery?"

"Yes. It will not, with our previous experience to guide us, be sooner than a month or two. Perhaps longer."

"Now, how far are you willing to go to help us?"

"How far—to help you—how far am I willing to go—"

"To help us escape. Without risking yourself in any way."

"I was not thinking of myself. I was considering my duty."

"Is it your duty to see innocent persons killed? Is it your duty to stand by and see a man shot so that a scoun-

drel may marry his widow? Is this the duty you learned at that college in New York?"

"Good Heavens, boy, you make me more the man than the priest! You appeal to instincts that have smoldered under skies that are not those of your country. Your hand—for the love I bear your country, I *will* help you."

"Then I am ill. Yet I must get a letter to Wakler."

"Where is he?"

"He is supposed to be on board the old boat Puffer, on Caros Island."

"Who would be a trusty messenger from me?"

"Old Quinchincha, the Quicha chief."

"Where is he?"

"I suppose he is now with Wakler, trying to float the Puffer. His people will be coming and going. Any of them may be trusted."

"And the letter?"

I began studying. I had had it in mind to give instructions to Wakler, but felt that the proper carrying out of them depended more on me.

I needed money to put any kind of plan in operation. And to get money I must be outside, free, in order to cable Drake. I knew he would send me what I needed.

"After all, *padre*," I said, "I will not send a letter. But get hold of one of these Quichas and send word to Wakler to let you know when the Puffer is afloat. By that time I will have thought out some kind of plan."

"I will do so. And I will also deliver the message to Innors and his wife and daughter that they must hope. That you will succeed."

"With your help."

"That is absolutely between you and me. I have given you my hand, and your tongue is still. But—sick men babble. I'll see you to-morrow."

CHAPTER X.

PLANNING AGAINST ODDS.

WHEN a man suddenly finds himself in a hog-pen from which there is no avenue of honest escape, with a certified promise of a dozen bullets at the end of his brief sojourn underground, by means of which he is to take up a permanent residence there, he is not over-particular about the ethics of the schemes that come into his head to effect his release.

Especially is this so when the girl he loves is in the same castle of misery and a dago waiting to marry her as soon as her mother is a widow and free to wed his friend.

Having gone to the length of winning the assistance of the good *padre,* the first thoughts that came to me after he had departed were to use him to any extent.

One idea that settled itself more or less firmly in my mind was to get him to change places with me for a time and become the prisoner, while I, masquerading as a priest, walked out of prison to freedom, to put into operation whatever plan seemed best to rescue the others.

At first blush the idea seemed good. But after I had pondered over the matter for a time there were difficulties to be encountered.

In the first place, the sudden disappearance of the chaplain of even a Central American prison would certainly cause excitement. The officer whose duty it was to visit the cells with food would certainly discover the exchange, with the result that, in all probability, Innors and the *padre* would both be shot at once, and the marriage of Mrs. Innors and Nellie would take place before I had set on foot a single plan for their rescue. In the second place, the *padre* stood only about to my shoulder, and in breadth and thickness was about half my size.

The figure I would cut walking out in his cassock would assuredly attract attention, with the probable result that I would be recaptured and the *padre* merely added to our shooting-party. Dismissing that, the next plan that suggested itself was to request him to bring another *padre,* if such would be allowed, more my own build, if one could be found, and let him make the exchange. But that involved another priest, and I knew it would be a difficult matter to find one willing to use the cloth of his holy calling in any such way.

Carrying a message for a prisoner is an innocent sort of assistance, whereas the use of the garments of his priesthood

would go against the grain of almost any man. I believed, after I had gone over the matter in my own mind several times, that even our own good *padre,* whose name I had not learned, would object to this, and say he could not find such a man.

And again, as the first excitement died away, I began to feel a little ashamed of myself for thinking of what could only be looked upon as an imposition on good nature. For the good *padre,* notwithstanding his education in America, seemed to be a simple-minded soul, and it was unmanly for me to make a request that would in any way lead to his danger or disgrace.

So, after hours of study, back and forth over the same lines of thought, I resolved to limit the sphere of the *padre's* usefulness simply to the carrying of messages, and—silence.

The rest of the business I would do myself—somehow—I had not yet thought of a way.

When my supper was brought to me, I was again huddled in a heap of misery. I could not eat. When the keeper, or whatever he was called, told me to eat, I merely groaned.

He left the tray of stuff—nobody could tell what it was—and went away. I felt I ought to eat something, for, not knowing what might be before me, I felt that I must reserve my strength.

Yet, if I ate the meal that had been left there, it would at once be suspected that I was shamming illness.

All night I sat in a corner, braced in the angle, and got a few hours of sleep. In the morning I was half-famished. For the light stuff eaten in warm countries soon digests, and leaves little strength to overcome hunger.

Still, when my breakfast arrived I pretended again to be ill, and the tray was removed from my cell.

Late that afternoon the *padre* came, and making sure that the guard who opened the door had gone, respecting the *padre's* mission, he handed me a note. It was on a page torn from what must have been one of the ledgers of the West Coast Company, and was from Wakler.

"Read it quickly, and give it back to me," said the *padre.*

It ran as follows:

> FORD—The tub floats. There is a slight leak on the port side, but I've stuffed it so that little water enters. The boilers and engine seem to be all right. What next?
>
> WAKLER.

I could have howled for joy, for his note shot an inspiration into my head.

"I am more grateful to you than I can tell you, *padre,*" I said. "Now there is something I want to know. When I was put in here everything was taken from me. I had some money. If I had a little that I could use, I might be able to get something fit to eat. I can't eat the stuff they bring me, and I am half famished. Wakler has some money. Can you arrange to get some for me?"

"I will endeavor to do so. Still, as for the food, I think I can fix that."

"You? Have you the power to order better food for prisoners?"

"No, unfortunately not. Had I that power every prisoner would be well fed. But you know they do not shoot a prisoner while he is very ill. Leave that to me. Do you still want money?"

"Yes, bring me the money. I may be able to use it."

"I doubt it. They have only those who can be trusted on guard here, and they are no friends of anybody connected with your company. They are creatures of Magnuz and Fonseca."

"Then, never mind the money. I will thank you for the food."

"And is there any other message I can send for you?"

I studied a moment. Every hour counted now, for if I was to get good food I would soon be well enough to be shot when Innors reached the same fortunate condition.

"Yes, *padre,*" I said, "there is. Have it understood that Quinchincha is to have a boat somewhere along the river, and there wait till I come, no matter how long. And have Wakler send me directions how to reach the spot."

"That I will do."

He was as good as his word. When my supper was brought that night, it consisted, instead of the usual nasty mess, of a tray of roast fowl, cassava, and a bowl of good coffee. How I blessed that *padre,* and how glad I was that he had been educated in the United States.

After that I felt better, but impatient to hear from Wakler.

At last the message came. When the *padre* visited me two days later he brought a note. It read as follows:

> FORD—Quinchincha will have a boat a mile below Choluteca, and will wait there till you come or till he drops dead. The only guide I can give you is an old white ruin, probably once a church, that stands on the road along the river. The Quicha will be opposite that. You may have to hunt because his boat will be hidden under an overhang. The tub still floats.
>
> WAKLER.

I returned the paper to the *padre*, and began to think some more.

CHAPTER XI.

DESPERATE MEASURES.

I REMEMBERED that when I first reached the prison most of the soldiers were playing cards or sleeping. If this was so in the daytime, under the eyes of the *alcaid*, I reasoned that at night there would be a greater laxity of discipline and watchfulness.

My white-duck trousers—alas! no longer white—were held up by a leather belt.

I loosened this so it could be released any moment. I then took off my coat, removed my shirt, and put on my coat again, hiding my shirt under it. Then I took off a shoe.

I confess that when I heard the bolt shoot back as the guard brought my supper, my heart beat a lively tune against my ribs. But I was resolved either to walk out of that prison that night or hurry the shooting-party with or without Innors's presence.

For every hour was precious, and everything so far had turned out well.

I was huddled as far away from the door as possible when the guard entered. He was nearly my own size.

"Pig of an *Americano*, who eats better food than the soldiers, here."

I turned, and in a crouching position reached out my left hand for the tray. He held it toward me with both hands, and was well bent over.

Before he could shout—almost before he knew it—I had leaped like a frog and brought the heel of my shoe down on his head with all the force I could muster.

He staggered. I caught him by the throat, and rained blow after blow on his head.

He dropped the tray, and tried to grope at me with his hands, but by shutting off his wind and pounding him with the heel, I soon had him unconscious.

Then I took my shirt, and stuffed as much as I could of it in his mouth till it was distended to the dimensions of a coffee-cup.

Then, to hold the gag in place, I tied, as tightly as possible, the sleeves back of his head. The length permitted me to wind them over his eyes, thus blindfolding him as well.

I was in no hurry. It was too early for me to leave the cell; and, as a matter of fact, I had even then no well-defined plan of action after I did leave. But the madness of desperation had seized me, and that night, I had determined, was to decide the fate of all.

I removed the fellow's uniform jacket, and then, with my belt wound round and round his wrists, buckled it so that his arms, pinioned behind him, were perfectly powerless.

His wrists were swollen from the tightness of the strap, but a pig of an American who is saving his own life and that of the girl he loves doesn't think of such trifles.

Just then I was in the mood to take the life of every official in Choluteca.

Laying the unconscious man on the floor, I removed his trousers, and then, with his own belt, fastened his ankles in the same manner as I had his wrists.

Then I proceeded leisurely to remove my own clothing and array myself in his uniform. I did not take the trouble to dress him in my cast-offs. He wouldn't freeze, and I had no time to think of his modesty, if he had any.

I even went so far as to change shoes, or at least take off my remaining one and put on his.

I found in one pocket a revolver of a well-known United States pattern, and in a pocket of the jacket a few cigarettes and matches.

The keys he carried were few in num-

ber, but great iron things that might have been cousins to the key of the Bastile.

I was now ready to depart, but was in no hurry. It was not quite dark enough. Yet, on the other hand, I dared not wait till it was too dark, for if conditions as I found them outside made it expedient for me to hurry to find Quinchincha and his boat, I could not see the road.

At last I judged the time to be ripe. I made an examination of the guard. He was still unconscious, but breathing. I made sure the fastenings were all good. Then I stepped out of the cell and locked the door behind me.

The cell opened into a narrow passage, with two or three cells like mine ranging along it, but they were all open. The place was lighted by a gloomy lantern hung on a peg, but it was sufficient to enable me to make my way.

I remembered the location of the stairs down which we had come, and finding nobody in the lower dungeons, I cautiously went up.

On the upper floor there was better light, but all from lanterns. One lone sentry was leaning against the wall, smoking a cigarette.

I lit one also, bending my head and hiding my face with my hands till I got close to him.

"How is the pig of an American?" he asked, thinking he was talking to his fellow guard.

With a tigerlike spring, before he could even gasp, I had him by the throat.

His eyes bulged in terror. He carried a short-barreled rifle.

Taking this, I banged him on the head —remorselessly, if you like, willing to kill him, if you like; but I had resolved that no lives should stand between Nellie Innors and liberty that night, even if I lost my own.

I soon had him battered into insensibility, and dragged him back, down the old stairway, and locked him in the cell with the other fellow.

Now I knew what to do, and knew that I had to do it quickly.

I had no doubt that there were at least a dozen or more of the same kind guarding, or pretending to guard, the main entrance. I did not know whether this was locked or not.

I threw away the cigarette I had lighted, and took another. I walked to the main entrance, and repeated the lighting performance. An officer sat within the open doorway, dozing. Half a dozen soldiers lolled about, jesting, smoking, unconscious of any danger.

I turned, and with my rifle, and the swing I assumed to match their own shuffling gait, walked back again.

I had no idea where any of the Innors family had been placed, but that made no difference.

Getting out of sight from the entrance, I opened the first cell I came to.

As the light from a lantern fell inside, a huge negro whose eyes were gleaming with a murderous hate seemed about to spring on me.

I made him a sign of friendship, and stepped inside the cell.

"Listen," I said, speaking in a whisper, "and make no noise. I am a prisoner as well as you. Do you want to escape?"

"Heavens, yes. I am to be shot."

"Will you do just what I tell you?"

"Yes."

"Walk lightly and follow me. You know the prison well, I suppose. Take me to the cells."

In one we found a man half dead with hunger, who in his mad frenzy began to curse. The big negro silenced him with a word. He joined us.

In that way, guided by the big negro, who had probably occupied half the cells at different times, I went along, liberating everybody. It mattered not to me what crimes they had committed against the wretches who had committed such horrible crimes against those I loved.

Opening one cell, I found Innors.

"Hush," I whispered. "Come with me. I am Ford."

Silently, wonderingly, he followed me.

In another I found Mrs. Innors and Nellie. This was the most comfortable place of all, and consisted really of a suite of three rooms.

I did not, however, waste any gratitude on their captors. Still, their imprisonment had perhaps saved them from greater perils in their helplessness. I sent Innors in to explain that they keep absolutely quiet.

"Is that all?" I asked the negro. "What is up in the towers?"

"Gun-rooms and bedrooms for the officers. Mess-rooms for the soldiers."

"Then, we have finished?"

"Yes, *señor.*"

"Then, listen. I have given you your freedom, but I exact something from you. At the entrance there are about a dozen soldiers. The commanding officer sits in the doorway, half asleep. I want you in some way to silence all of them. I don't care how you do it, so long as you leave us a free passage. And when you get away, go to the north. Leave the south streets free and clear for us. Do you understand?"

"Yes, and thank you, *señor.* I'll have it done."

He spoke in a low tone to the others, who clustered around him eagerly. They were the worst lot I had ever seen—but, as I have said, I was not fastidious.

He gave a sign, and they moved off. They did not make a sound even on the stone floor as they crept toward the entrance. Nellie clung to me, shivering.

"What is it, Bob?" she whispered. "Will they kill?"

"I don't know," I said grimly, "and I don't care."

Suddenly there was a roar of rage, mingled with terror, and a few shots.

The shouts of savage victory I knew came from those I had set at liberty.

Then, above the tumult, came a cry:

"All right, *señor.*"

Then all was still.

"Come," I directed.

When we got to the entrance I saw the officer stretched on the floor and half his men lying about. As the escaped prisoners had no arms, I supposed the men were merely stunned, but did not stop to learn.

We hurried past them all. I could hear, at some distance, firing and shouting; I knew the negro had made good.

"This way," I said, turning south.

We did not need to hurry. The populace that had been abroad had hurried after the fleeing prisoners, and the streets we traversed were almost deserted.

CHAPTER XII.

AMID THE BOOM OF GUNS.

ONCE beyond the town, on the road that ran by the river, I felt comparatively safe. No one had seemed to pay us any particular attention.

Nellie was weeping from sheer excitement. I feared Mrs. Innors would faint and Innors collapse. Hope, however, kept them both up.

But little was said. It was too breathless a time for conversation.

"I want to see a big white ruin," I said to Nellie.

A mile is nothing when you are taking a stroll. When you are fleeing from what would be certain death if you are caught, it is apparently endless. It seemed as though we would never get to where there was a ruin.

"There!" exclaimed Nellie. "What's that?"

Out of the darkness rose a great white wall, with a broken sky-line, and another running from it at right angles.

"The ruin," I said. "This way."

I turned toward the river. It was not far off, but we had to plunge through vines and shrubs. We reached the bank.

"Quinchincha?" I said softly.

There was no answer.

"Quinchincha?" I said a little louder.

"Here, *señor.* Quick—I hear firing in the city. A gunboat will be after us soon. Hurry."

I helped them into the boat, while the old Quicha held it steady.

By this time Innors and his wife were ready to drop. Her strength had given out supporting him, while I had almost carried Nellie.

I helped the old chief with the oars. Not a word was said, while we sent the boat through the water at racing speed.

There were no lights on the Puffer, but I saw the dull form in the gloom as we approached.

"Hi!" called Quinchincha.

"All right there?" answered Wakler.

"Yes."

"Glory be! This way."

The Indian knew the ropes, and soon we were all on the deck of the Puffer.

"No time to talk," I said. "Is she all right?"

"She's on top of the water, anyway," answered Wakler.

"Have you got steam up?"

"Betcher life."

"Do you know the way well enough to make La Union at night?"

"San Salvador? With my eyes shut."

"Then, take the wheel. I don't know much about marine engines, but I'll try."

"Give me a drink of something—whisky, brandy, anything," said Innors, with the frenzied eagerness of a desperate man roused by hope. "I can run the engine."

Wakler poured the liquor down his throat.

"Better not let her get more than half her gage," he said.

Innors knew his business, and Wakler knew his.

I supplied the fuel. Wakler and the Quichas had not been idle. The Puffer was a wood-burner, and there was a considerable quantity of this piled up ready for use.

The old hulk got under way, and under the iron arm of Wakler went safely past reefs and rocks until Caros Island was left far behind.

Far up the Choluteca River we saw the light of signal-fires.

The booming of cannon came to our ears. What seemed to be a search-light swept the sky.

But the Puffer was going some, and I knew that once we were in the harbor of La Union no gunboat from Choluteca would dare follow us.

"Hallo!" bellowed Wakler after a while. He was calling down the speaking-tube. "Gunboat following. Put on more steam. We've got to risk it."

I piled on the wood, and Innors opened every draft. We might as well blow up as be recaptured.

A gun sounded. We were not hit, and I piled on more wood.

That old machinery, long supposed to be useless, could eat wood as a tiger eats deer-meat.

It seemed hours before I heard Wakler's voice again. I took a look astern, and saw the lights of the gunboat.

"Hallo, down there! Hallo!"

"Hallo!" I answered.

It was Wakler at the tube.

"Ease up a little, and don't bu'st her. We've passed Alligator Island. We are in La Union Harbor."

My arms seemed to drop limp and useless at my sides. We were safe.

It was as Wakler said. The lights of the gunboat grew less distinct, and as we steamed into a bay within sight of the lighthouse at La Union they disappeared altogether.

And as we swung at anchor the lights of a great war-ship showed quite near us.

"Ahoy! What ship is that?" came through a megaphone.

"The Puffer, of the West Coast Company, with Americans aboard," bawled Wakler, making a megaphone of his hands. "What ship is that?"

"The United States cruiser Manhattan!" came back the answer.

"Thank God!" said everybody on board. And the women wept.

After that our way was easy, and our minds were clear. I telegraphed to Drake for money, and received it by wire in two days.

We left the Puffer at La Union, and took passage for New York on a Pacific Mail steamer.

Our journey home was almost uneventful.

One day I walked into the office of the West Coast Mining and Improving Company, expecting to find Drake sitting there alone and disconsolate, smoking a cigar.

Instead, I saw him up to his neck in business, with a stenographer.

He greeted me warmly.

"Well," he said cheerily, "what's the good word? What are the assets?"

"A few miles of useless track, half buried in the sand, one useless steamboat at La Union, and two men and two women out of prison, plus one heroic engineer who deserves his pay."

"I've got you beaten. I've got an absconding treasurer *in* prison, four hundred and fifty thousand dollars recovered money, a new concession under the new regime which does away with all departmental control, and a guarantee of security vouched for by our own consul at Tegucigalpa."

"Good enough," I said. "I am still a rich man. You keep right on being a receiver, and make Wakler manager. I've had all of the west coast I want. I'm going to be married and settle down."

And that's exactly what I did—with Nellie's help.

THE END.

MR. BUTTERWORTH'S BABY.

By C. LANGTON CLARKE.

In which Mr. Scales receives small thanks for laying himself on the altar of sacrifice in the cause of friendship.

"GEORGE," said Mrs. Scales, suddenly entering the study, where Mr. Scales, in slippers and smoking-coat, sat reading the evening paper before the gas-grate, "Mrs. Butterworth is downstairs."

"Really!" replied Mr. Scales, with a very faint show of interest. "Butterworth there?"

"No," said Mrs. Scales. "That's what has brought her here."

"You don't mean to say she has lost him?" Mr. Scales queried, with a grin. "A good thing, too. Ever since he got married he's been tagging around after her like—like a poodle dog on a string."

"It would be a good thing if some other husbands were a little more like him," responded Mrs. Scales tartly. "She hasn't lost her husband, but she is in great distress—she has lost her baby."

Mr. Scales put down his paper, and stared at his wife with every manifestation of concern.

"Good Lord!" he said. "I'm awfully sorry to hear that. Poor little beggar! What did he die of?"

"I do wish you wouldn't jump at conclusions so, George," Mrs. Scales cried impatiently. "I didn't say the child was dead—I said she had lost it."

"Oh," said Mr. Scales, resuming his paper. "Where did she lose it? Drop it down a manhole?"

"I have told you before, George," replied Mrs. Scales witheringly, "that being funny doesn't suit you. You are much too stodgy to be a humorist."

"All right," said Mr. Scales, much affronted. "What's it got to do with me? I suppose she'll find the child."

He whipped over a couple of pages of his paper, and began to read.

"She wants you to find it," said Mrs. Scales.

"Eh?" cried Mr. Scales, thoroughly aroused. "*Me?* What on earth business is it of mine? How the deuce do you suppose I am going to find the child?"

Mrs. Scales shrugged her shoulders with an exaggerated air of patience under extreme provocation.

"When I said, George," she explained, seating herself, and speaking with the deliberation of one who seeks to enlighten a particularly stupid child, "when I said she had lost the baby, I didn't mean that she doesn't know where it is."

"Really?" replied the husband sarcastically. "Speaking with a somewhat imperfect recollection of the definition of the word 'lose' in the dictionary, I don't exactly understand how she can have lost the child at all if she knows where it is."

Mrs. Scales restrained herself with difficulty.

"It's this way," she explained, darting an angry glance at her husband. "About four o'clock the little girl who looks after the baby took him out in his carriage for an airing. Mrs. Butterworth told her on no account to stay out more than an hour and a half, but by six o'clock the girl hadn't turned up. Seven o'clock, and eight o'clock came, and the poor woman was frantic. Ten minutes ago she got a telephone message from the police station on Hamburg Avenue that a policeman had found the nurse and baby, who had lost their way, and had taken them to the station-house. They are there now. Is that sufficiently plain to you?"

"Well," commented Mr. Scales, "it seems to me that there's a good deal of fuss about nothing. Does she think some one will have to go to bail them out?"

"She doesn't think anything of the sort," replied Mrs. Scales sharply, "but they can't stay there all night. Some one will have to bring them home."

"Why doesn't she go herself?" demanded Mr. Scales.

"She is far too nervous and unstrung. She says the sight of her baby in a police station would upset her completely."

"It's certainly beginning young," said Mr. Scales, with an unfeeling grin. "What's the matter with Butterworth going? It's his baby."

"Mr. Butterworth is not at home. He had several business appointments downtown this evening, and did not come home to dinner. His wife does not know how to reach him."

"Allow me to suggest another expedient, and a very simple one," said Mr. Scales. "You go. I'll call up a cab or a taxicab."

"I'm not going," replied Mrs. Scales firmly—"not while there's an idle man in the house. And, besides, a cab is no good. You can't carry a great big baby-carriage in a cab. It's no use your making so many difficulties and being so disagreeable, George. You've simply got to go. All you need do is to take a street-car to the station—it's not more than four miles—put the nurse and baby on the car, and hang the carriage on behind. I've seen them do that dozens of times. You don't need to sit with the baby on the car if you don't want to. You can stand on the back platform and smoke. Surely that is not asking so very much of you?"

"I suppose I'll have to go," said Mr. Scales sulkily, kicking his slippers across the room and hoisting himself out of the roomy recess of his chair. "I don't see why I should be let in for this sort of thing. I don't see—"

"You can indulge in those speculations when you get back, George," interrupted Mrs. Scales briskly. "In the meantime Mrs. Butterworth is waiting, so put on your boots at once, please, and start."

She swept out of the room, and Mr. Scales, with many muttered imprecations on the infantile world in general, and Mrs. Butterworth's baby in particular, put on his boots and tramped heavily down-stairs, to be overwhelmed with gratitude by a tearful mother.

"You will be *so* careful of him, won't you, Mr. Scales?" she said imploringly. "See that his little cap is pulled well down, and *please* don't let him be in a draft in the street-car."

Mr. Scales, too much disgusted with his mission to feign cordiality, grunted an inarticulate reply, and, snatching his umbrella, escaped into the night. A slight drizzle which had begun to fall did not improve his temper, and it was not till a vivacious young street-car conductor had trodden heavily on his foot that he found adequate vent for his pent-up feelings.

The trip was a long and tedious one, involving a transfer half-way, and a ten-minute wait in the rain for a belated car, and by the time Mr. Scales entered the gloomy portals of the police station his temper was alternating between deep despondency and bitter wrath.

"Fine baby, sir," observed the desk-sergeant pleasantly, when Mr. Scales had briefly explained the purpose of his mission. "Quite a credit to you."

"It isn't mine," replied Mr. Scales snappishly. "I don't know whether it's a fine baby or not, and I don't care. It belongs to a friend of mine, and I've had to come out on this infernal night to look after it. Where is it? I've got to get it home."

The sergeant, somewhat taken aback at this display of ill temper on the part of his visitor, replied that the baby was in the guard-room, and ushered Mr. Scales into a large, bare apartment, where he found the infant seated on the lap of its small attendant and surrounded by several stalwart constables.

"Here's his dad," said one of them.

"As like as a big pea and a little one," commented another, with a propitiatory smile.

Mr. Scales replied to this compliment with a look of great disfavor, and turned angrily on the girl.

"How in thunder did you get here?" he demanded sternly. "Why didn't you ask your way when you found you were lost? Haven't you got a tongue in your head?"

Apparently the girl had lost her powers of speech for the second time that evening, for she stared open-mouthed at Mr. Scales and then began to cry.

"Stop that snuffling," commanded Mr. Scales fiercely, "and put that brat in its carriage."

"Easy—easy does it," hinted the sergeant indulgently. "You'll scare the little girl to death. Lend a hand, one of

you boys, and get the youngster stowed away comfortable."

By the united efforts of three policemen and the little servant, who assumed command, the infant was bestowed in its carriage, and a small procession started up the street for the car-line intersection, a group of constables at the door of the station-house making audible comments on Mr. Scales's lack of self-control.

First went by the baby-carriage, pushed by the nurse-girl with one hand while the other struggled with Mr. Scales's umbrella, and a few yards behind came Mr. Scales, with one anxious eye on his charge, and the other on the lookout to avoid any chance meeting with an acquaintance.

A gleaming umbrella was suddenly swept aside to avoid a collision with the head of the procession, and Mr. Scales found himself face to face with a gray-whiskered, red-faced gentleman, who greeted him cordially.

"Hallo, Scales! Beastly night, isn't it?"

"Infernal!" assented Mr. Scales hastily, and tried to dodge past, but the gray-whiskered gentleman barred the way.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "I was looking for you this afternoon, and—"

"Sorry, my dear chap," replied Mr. Scales, who saw the baby-carriage drawing rapidly ahead, "I'm in a deuce of a hurry."

"You can surely spare me a couple of minutes," went on the other, anchoring the harassed Mr. Scales by a coat-button. "That house I was looking at the other day—"

"Stop!" yelled Mr. Scales suddenly. "Stop right there!"

The gray-whiskered gentleman regarded him with astonishment and offense writ large on his features.

"All right," he said huffily, "if you don't want to hear what I've got to say."

"I wasn't speaking to you," replied Mr. Scales, glaring in front of him. "I was calling to that girl on ahead."

The other, with a wink and a waggish grin, looked around and then glanced back at Mr. Scales with surprise.

"Why, she's only a child," he said reprovingly.

"What do you take me for?" protested Mr. Scales angrily, as the nurse-girl, in obedience to his shout, brought the carriage to a dead stop. "Do you suppose I came out a night like this to flirt with nurse-maids. The fact is—" And in a few words and with a somewhat shamefaced manner he explained the circumstances.

"Oh!" said the other, with a chuckle. "So that's Butterworth's kid, and you're playing nurse. Why don't you get some of your own, Scales? You're cut out for a family man. Well, I won't stop you. I wish you luck and a safe journey. Would you like me to turn back and see you to the car?"

Mr. Scales, irritated by this ill-timed jocularity, declined the offer with some heat, and, shaking off the old gentleman's grasp, hurried on.

"Now, listen to me," he said, ranging alongside the nurse-girl and speaking in as amiable a tone as he could command: "When the car comes you will take the baby out of the carriage, go right into the car with it, and find a seat well forward. I will look after the carriage and stay out on the platform. When we reach the transfer-point I will come into the car and signal to you to get off. On no account move until you see me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," replied the girl obediently. "I'm to stay on the car till you tell me to get off."

"Quite right," assented Mr. Scales encouragingly. "Here's a car-ticket for you. There is no need for you to let people see that I am looking after you. Do exactly as I tell you and I will give you a quarter when we get home."

"Thank you, sir," said the girl dully. "There's a car coming now. Shall I take baby out?"

Mr. Scales nodded assent, and the little party took their places in the roadway, the nurse hugging the baby, who was beginning to show signs of fractiousness at these sudden changes of location, and Mr. Scales grasping the handle of the baby-carriage with the tense look of a starter in a hundrd-yard dash.

The car came to a halt, and the nurse dutifully climbed aboard with the baby, while Mr. Scales skipped nimbly to the rear with the carriage.

"Hey!" said the conductor, suddenly

appearing. "What are you doing with that?"

"Bear a hand," replied Mr. Scales authoritatively, "and hang it up. Catch hold of the handle."

"Ketch hold nothing," retorted the conductor. "You can't hang no baby-kebs on this car. What d'ye take us for —a freight line?"

"Nonsense," cried Mr. Scales angrily. "I've seen baby-carriages hung behind these cars for years."

"Not for the last two weeks you aint," replied the conductor, who appeared to resent Mr. Scales's dictatorial manner. "Special order out against it two weeks ago."

He leered offensively at Mr. Scales, and the latter grew furious.

"I'll report you for insolence," he said. "I'll take good care you lose your job."

"Aw, don't!" replied the conductor. "Git into the kerridge and push yerself home. We got a schedule to make and no time to gossip. So long!"

He signaled with the bell to the impatient motorman, and the car sprang forward with a jerk. Mr. Scales made a wild clutch at the rail, tripped over the baby-carriage, and as he rolled in the muddy roadway he heard a loud laugh from several passengers on the rear platform, the conductor's hoarse cackle predominating. By the time he had regained his feet the car was a block away and speeding fast.

For several moments, what with the shock of the fall and a hazy realization of the horrors of his position, Mr. Scales's head was in a whirl, and he could only stand gazing after the quickly disappearing car.

Then he recovered his faculties, and did full justice to the occasion. So forcible was his language that a passer-by, garbed like a working man, paused to listen, and then stepped to his side.

"What's up, partner?" he asked. "Don't bu'st yourself."

Mr. Scales, glad to find a listener, told him, with many lurid comments on the conductor and the street-car company, winding up with a few less vigorous remarks about babies and nurse-maids.

"And that idiot of a girl," he concluded, "will sit in that car, waiting for me to tell her to get out, and she and that infernal baby will be carried out to the Felham Avenue end of the line, seven miles away."

"Well, it's only what you told her to do, ain't it?" argued his hearer unsympathetically, and Mr. Scales ground his teeth as he recalled his explicit instructions.

"Wot I think is," said the other after a pause for cogitation, "that wot'll happen is this: the conductor'll find out where the girl's bound for, an' he'll unload her at the transfer-place, an' either tell her wot car to take or to wait there till you come along. Wot you'd better do is to take the next car—I see one comin' now—an' I'll bet you find 'em all right."

"And what am I going to do with this cursed carriage?" demanded Mr. Scales, bestowing a fractious kick on one of the front wheels. "I can't leave it standing here on the sidewalk."

His adviser scratched his head thoughtfully.

"My name," he said, "is Joel Walker, carpenter by trade. I live at 36 Cortelyou Place, about four blocks northeast of here. I ain't above makin' a bit on the side. For half a dollar I'll trundle the kerridge home an' shove it in the back kitchen. It'll be safe enough. There ain't no one in the house but me and my missus. When you git home an' find the kid safe, you can either come after it yourself or send an express-wagon. Joel—Walker—thirty-six—Cortelyou—Place," he added slowly, to impress the address on his hearer. "You'd better write it down before the car comes along."

Mr. Scales, to whom this seemed the easiest way out of his difficulty, and with his spirits considerably improved by Mr. Walker's optimism, hastily scribbled the address on the back of an envelope and handed over half a dollar.

"Be careful," he admonished the other as he scrambled aboard. "It's a pretty expensive carriage, that. Here," he added as an afterthought, "you'd better take this umbrella and keep the rain off the cushions. You can send it back by the expressman."

Mr. Walker accepted the umbrella with a grin, and waved his hand in

cheery farewell; and Mr. Scales, looking back, saw him examining handle, ribs, and silk in evident appreciation of their quality.

On reaching the transfer-point, Mr. Scales descended and glanced eagerly around, but there was no sign of nurse-girl or baby. A seedy-looking man was lounging, with upturned collar, against a telegraph-post, and to him Mr. Scales applied.

"How long have you been on this corner?" he demanded.

The stranger, turning, eyed his interrogator from head to foot lazily, and ejected a stream of tobacco-juice.

"I d'know," he said listlessly. "'Bout fifteen minutes, I guess. Why?"

"Did you see a girl with a baby on this corner ten minutes ago?" inquired Mr. Scales eagerly.

"I d'know but what I did," replied the man, who looked as if he had lost interest in all things mundane.

"Smallish girl in a blue dress?" persisted Mr. Scales feverishly.

The seedy man nodded in a bored manner.

"Thank Heavens!" ejaculated Mr. Scales fervently, and produced a quarter, for he believed in rewarding good news.

"I suppose," he went on, "that they boarded a Grand Avenue car."

Whatever doubts the other might have entertained were speedily dispelled by the sight of the coin.

"Sure they did," he asseverated warmly. "Didn't I help 'em on board myself, pretty dears?"

Mr. Scales expressed his thanks and presented the quarter. The stranger pocketed it without a word, and, galvanized into sudden activity, hurried toward the lights of a near-by saloon.

"That girl isn't such a blame fool as I thought," soliloquized Mr. Scales as he settled himself in a car. "She'll know enough to take the brat straight home, and I'll phone them that the carriage is all right. No more baby chasing for me, if I know it. However, all's well that ends well."

It was with a light heart, and a consciousness of a duty fairly well performed, that Mr. Scales entered his hall, and, having shaken the rain-drops from his hat, made his way up-stairs to the study, longing for the interrupted comforts of slippers, cigar, and cozy grate.

There was a murmur of voices within, and he paused to listen. Then he flung open the door and stopped, astounded, on the threshold.

Lying back in an easy chair, looking very white and faint, was Mrs. Butterworth, tightly gripping the hand of Mrs. Scales, who was murmuring words of hope and comfort; while Mr. Butterworth, a short, rotund man, impatiently paced the floor with his hands in his trousers-pockets and a portentous frown on his usually placid brow.

"Good Heavens, Scales!" cried the anxious father when the envoy made his appearance. "Where on earth have you been?"

"Where have I been?" echoed Mr. Scales indignantly. "Where you ought to have been if you hadn't been gadding about when you should have been at home. Where have I—"

Mr. Butterworth threw up his hands.

"All right, all right!" he cried impatiently. "Where is the baby?"

"Home," replied Mr. Scales confidently.

"Home?" repeated the other. "Why, there isn't any one there. We expected you to bring them here. The house is locked up. How did you get in?"

Mr. Scales stared at him blankly.

"I didn't get in at all," he stammered. "I—I—"

"You don't mean to say you left them standing out in the rain?" roared Mr. Butterworth.

"N-no," said Mr. Scales.

"Then where are they?" shouted the other. "Didn't you bring them back?"

"Part of the way," replied Mr. Scales weakly.

Mrs. Butterworth uttered a faint scream, Mrs. Scales glared at her husband, and Mr. Butterworth looked as if he were meditating an assault.

"Part of the way?" he cried. "Do you mean to say you sent them on ahead alone?"

"I didn't send them," Mr. Scales said wearily. "They went."

All three gazed at him as if he had suddenly been bereft of reason.

"Oh! Oh!" sobbed Mrs. Butter-

worth. "Perhaps the little darling is waiting outside in the street for his own mother to come to him. Oh, William! Run, run and see."

Mr. Butterworth, in spite of his corpulence, dashed violently down the stairs, and, hatless, tore up the street to his own house. In a few minutes he was back again, breathless.

"They're not there!" he cried wildly. "They're not there. Where are they, Scales? What have you done with them?"

"A man on the street corner—" Mr. Scales was beginning feebly, when the telephone-bell jingled loudly, and Mrs. Scales, brushing her husband impatiently aside, caught up the receiver.

"Yes?" she cried eagerly. "Who's speaking— Felham Avenue car-barns? Yes— What? A little girl and a baby? The little girl told you to call up here? Yes— No— Their house is locked up— Thank you so much, the father and mother are here— I'm sorry you have had so much trouble— Oh, yes; we'll send for them right off."

She hung up the receiver, swung round on the desk-chair, and fixed a stony gaze on her husband, who, under the indignant scrutiny of three pairs of eyes, felt very much like a small boy arraigned before a family circle to explain his misdeeds.

"Well, George," Mrs. Scales said at last, breaking a painful silence, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

Thus challenged, Mr. Scales breathlessly reeled off his story, interrupted occasionally by the indignant or contemptuous snorts of Mr. Butterworth and the sobs of the mother.

"Really, George," said Mrs. Scales, when he had brought the recital to a conclusion, "of all the hopelessly incompetent nincompoops— However, what's the use of talking? Mr. Butterworth, you had better start at once."

"I'll go, if you like," ventured Mr. Scales humbly, utterly crushed and eager to make amends.

"You?" sneered Mr. Butterworth. "We should get another telephone message in an hour or two from the other end of the line. No, thank you; I'll go myself this time. Mrs. Scales, would you mind calling up your expressman and sending him for the carriage; that is"—with a withering glance at the unhappy Mr. Scales—"if Scales can remember the address? I will leave my wife in your hands till I return. No, thank you, Scales; I can find my own way out."

He marched out of the room with as much dignity as his corpulence and inches would permit, and Mr. Scales, after one or two futile efforts to palliate his offenses, subsided into an armchair, and pretended to read the paper until the return of Mr. Butterworth with the truants.

"There, George," said Mrs. Scales to her husband, who had gazed with a gloomy eye on the joyful reunion of mother and child. "You see, it wasn't such a dreadful task, after all. Mr. Butterworth had no trouble, and he had to go a good mile farther than you."

"He didn't have a baby-carriage to look after," retorted Mr. Scales, plucking up a little spirit.

"Well, well," said Mr. Butterworth good-humoredly, "we won't say any more about it. Scales did the best he could, which isn't very much. By the way, Mrs. Scales, has the carriage arrived yet? We'll have to be getting home."

"Not yet," replied Mrs. Scales. "I can't think what is keeping Watson so long."

There was a rattle of wheels outside, which stopped in front of the house; a ring at the door-bell, followed by a murmur of voices in the hall, and in a few moments the servant appeared.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, "Watson says he hasn't got the baby-carriage, and could you please come down and speak to him."

A dead silence followed, and then Mr. Scales, with a terrible sinking of the heart, rose up and went down, followed by his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Butterworth, and the baby. In the hall stood a strong-bodied man, twisting his cap.

"I went to the address you give me, ma'am," he said, "36 Cortelyou Place, but there ain't no Joel Walker there. A Mrs. Wilkins, a widow woman, lives in the house, and she said she never heard of no Joel Walker, and she's been living on the street nigh onto ten years.

I done my best. I asked up an' down, but no one else ever heard of him. There's a William Walker at 58, but he said he hadn't been out o' the house all evening, and didn't know nothing of no baby-kerridge. He was quite ugly over it."

Mrs. Scales cast one eloquent look at her husband, and turned to the express-man again.

"Thank you, Watson," she said. "I am sure *you* have done your best."

The expressman, missing the emphasis on the personal pronoun, knuckled his forehead in acknowledgment and departed, and the procession wended its way silently up-stairs again, Mr. Scales this time bringing up the rear.

"Well, George," said Mrs. Scales in devastating tones, when court had once more reassembled in the study, "what have you got to say for yourself this time?"

Mr. Scales did not appear to have anything to say for himself at all, but looked helplessly at his inquisitor.

"To give—" cried Mrs. Scales, gesticulating with outspread hands—"to give Mrs. Butterworth's baby-carriage—her fifty-dollar baby-carriage, and your own umbrella—a *seven-dollar umbrella*—to a man you knew absolutely nothing about—a thief—and go jaunting away as cheerfully as possible on a street-car!"

"Cheerful?" muttered Mr. Scales under his breath.

"All that I can say, George," continued his wife, "is that I *am* surprised. Aren't you, Mr. Butterworth?"

"No," replied Mr. Butterworth bitterly. "I can't say that I am. You see, I've known Scales for a long time."

Mr. Scales darted an angry look at his friend.

"All *I've* got to say is—" he began, when his wife broke in.

"The less you say the better, George," she said in a resigned tone. "I think the best thing you can do is to go to bed."

Mr. Scales looked at his wife, at Mr. Butterworth, at Mrs. Butterworth. In all their eyes he read condemnation and disapproval. Lastly, he looked at the baby.

As his gaze rested on the placid countenance of the infant, the recollection of all that he had suffered on its behalf surged up in his breast. He stifled an imprecation, swung on his heel, marched out of the room, and banged the door loudly behind him.

THE IMPOSTOR.

By DOUGLAS PIERCE,

Author of "Two Tickets to Tuckerton," "The Shaft of Light," "Chasing Rainbows," etc.

A Western story of a mine worth millions whose ownership was hedged about with mystery and made a target for crime.

CHAPTER I.

"THE BIG WEASEL."

"DEAD, by gosh!"

With an involuntary gasp, Hart drew back from his hasty examination of the wasted, inert figure upon the couch.

A few moments before, while carelessly loitering down the trail, he had chanced to notice that the little cabin back among the pines, where "Uncle Billy" Burke maintained a hermit-like existence, presented a more than ordinarily lonely and deserted appearance. Its doors and windows were closed, and no smoke was issuing from the chimney. Recalling that he had not seen the old man about for a day or so, he decided to investigate.

Failing to receive an answer to repeated hallooings and knocks upon the door, he had then, with apprehensions fully aroused, forced an entrance.

But, even prepared though he was by the silence and the sight of the relaxed, helpless form upon the bed, he recoiled with a distinct shock from the marble cold of the brow upon which he laid his

hand. We are all of us apt to be more or less appalled when ushered unannounced into the presence of the Great Mystery.

"Dead, by gosh!" repeated Hart; then added slowly, with narrowing eyes: "And who now is the owner of the Gladys B.?"

He plunged his hands into his pockets, and stood looking down at the dead man, his face a riddle of conflicting emotions.

So still he was in the reverie into which he had fallen that a chipmunk hopped in at the open door of the cabin and, squatting on the step, gazed at him fearlessly with its bright, beady eyes.

Then, his strong, bearded face darkening, he roused up with a sudden gesture of decision, and the chipmunk whisked away into the bushes.

Hart followed it to the door, and gazed warily up and down the trail. Not a soul in sight, and, as he well knew, there was little likelihood of any one coming that way for the next hour or more.

Nevertheless, he was evidently inclined to waste no time in what he had determined to do. Turning back into the cabin, he commenced a hurried, but none the less thorough, investigation of its contents.

The rickety chest of drawers, with its meager array of clothing, was fully gone over, the closet and the shelf behind the door ransacked, and he even dived under the bed to explore there.

But, whatever it was he sought, his search was evidently unavailing; for at each successive place he tried his frown of disappointment grew more pronounced, and he tumbled the things back with less ceremony.

At last, conquering the natural repugnance which had hitherto held him back, he approached the bed itself. His hand, feeling carefully under the pillow and along the mattress, brought forth no return; but when he nerved himself to touch the corpse, he had not gone far before something crackled like paper under his eager fingers.

With a low cry of satisfaction, he thrust a hand into the old man's bosom, and drew forth a thin, carefully tied packet of documents.

Hastily he undid the string and glanced them over. They were all records of mining claims and copies of leases, or such like memoranda of the dead man's rather extensive business transactions.

Hart straightened up, a flash of triumph in his eye.

"Not a thing," he whispered thrillingly, "not a thing to interfere, or cause a question to be raised. It will be like getting money from home."

From the shelf behind the door he procured a pen and bottle of ink; then, spreading out the folded documents upon the shaky table, he spent a good half hour in carefully tracing and copying upon a sheet of paper the old man's cramped and uneven signature. Having at last succeeded to his liking, he wrote rapidly for a few moments on a fresh sheet, and to it appended the imitation he had been practising, adding below his own name as a witness.

The task was just completed when he was startled by the sound of a footstep outside the door. Hastily brushing the papers together, he thrust them into the bosom of his flannel shirt, not noticing in his confusion that the telltale sheet upon which he had been conducting his experiments slipped from among the rest and fluttered away under the bed.

At sight of the intruder, however, he drew a breath of quick relief and smiled contemptuously at his own guilty panic.

It was only an Indian squaw, who paused, stolid and indifferent, in the doorway, her lusterless black hair bound in two long, heavy braids on either side of her submissively bowed head.

"Ah, Wunna," exclaimed Hart, striving to speak naturally, "I am glad you have come. Uncle Billy here has just died, and I must go down to the camp to tell the boys. You wait here until some of us come back."

He chucked her a coin as he spoke, and with a grunt of assent she came inside and squatted down upon the floor.

Hart lingered for a moment to cast one last glance about the cabin, picked up the pen and ink to replace them on the shelf, but, on second thought, decided to let them remain where they were; then, with an impatient gesture, he strode from the place and hurried off down the trail.

The watcher left behind continued to sit silent, wrapped apparently in apathy

until the last sound of his retreating footsteps had died away; then she raised her head, and a gleam of shrewdness crept into her dark, impenetrable eyes.

"Huh!" she nodded slowly to herself. "The Big Weasel is troubled in spirit. Fear was on him when I stood in the door. He spoke to me with a forked tongue."

She scrambled to her feet and, passing swiftly to the bed, laid a tentative hand upon the stiff, cold arm of the corpse.

Again she grunted in a scornful guttural.

"Just died?" she muttered. "It is a full sun since the red hunter's arrow struck the old man's heart. The Big Weasel lied. He lied," she repeated; "but why? Why?"

Her black eyes roved about the room in quest of a clue, returning ever to the pen and bottle of ink upon the table; for, indifferent as she had seemed, she had not failed to observe Hart's uncertain movements in regard to those two articles. She felt, in a vague, uncomprehending way, that they must be connected with the problem she was trying to solve.

Then a vagrant breeze wandering in at the open door lightly stirred the overlooked sheet of paper under the bed, and her sharp ears catching its rustle, she stooped quickly and gained possession of it.

The ink, she perceived, was still fresh —too fresh for the writing to have been done by any other than Hart—and a more or less desultory attendance at the mission school enabled her to spell out with some difficulty the succession of signatures.

"'Wm. Burke,'" she read. "'Wm. Burke,' 'Wm. Burke,' 'Wm. Burke.' It is all 'Wm. Burke.' Nothing but 'Wm. Burke.' That is his name," nodding her head toward the stark figure on the bed; "but he did not write it. What does it mean?"

For a long time she sat poring over the scribbled page, striving to grasp its significance, but at last she had to shake her head and give it up. The matter was too deep for her.

Nevertheless, she carefully folded the bit of evidence, and tucked it away in a buckskin bag she wore about her neck.

"One can never tell," she mused, the glow of an unappeased hate in her glance. "It was the Big Weasel who gave fire-water to Lone Pine, my husband and, when he had got him drunk, cheated him at the cards out of his money and his ponies and his blankets, and all that we had.

"Perhaps"—as she patted the little bag upon her breast—"perhaps I have here the noose which shall yet entrap the Big Weasel's cunning paw."

Then she hunted out a fresh sheet of paper from the shelf and, crumpling it up, burned it in the fireplace; so that when Hart came to her later, and questioned rather eagerly whether she had seen any writing in the cabin, she replied that she had found a scrawled-up leaf in straightening out the place, and supposing it to be no good had destroyed it, with some other trash.

For proof she pointed to the little heap of blackened ashes upon the hearth.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEXT OF KIN.

WHILE Wunna, the squaw, was thus occupying herself at the cabin of the old recluse, Hart's long legs were carrying him rapidly down the mountainside to the little settlement at its foot.

Six months before, Lame Creek had been an unknown and unfrequented spot in the virgin wilderness; then Billy Burke, the old prospector, roaming over the mountains, had spied, as he stooped to drink from the babbling stream, something which set his withered heart athrill; and, following up the surface indications, had made at last the "strike" of which he had been dreaming for more than forty years.

Now, the silent hillsides were riven with great gashes and scars where shafts were being sunk and tunnels driven in; the woods resounded constantly to the blows of the ax and the shrieking of the saw, where timber was being got out for the manifold operations; in the valley, where none had formerly set foot save the creatures of the forest and an occasional red man almost equally wild, there was a straggling array of rough board shacks and canvas tents, and

there each night more than a hundred men gathered to drink and gamble and hold high revelry under the stars.

By a sudden wave of Fortune's wand, old Billy Burke had been transformed from a ragged wanderer and vagabond to a millionaire—many times a millionaire, perhaps; for it was impossible as yet to tell just how rich his find might turn out to be. There were some enthusiasts who held it to be nothing short of a second Comstock.

All his life long the old man had been looking for it. All his life long he had been planning and dreaming what he would do when wealth finally came.

He would travel to Paris and London; he would have a silk hat and a massive gold watch-chain; he would go back to his native village in Vermont, and build himself a house there as big as the Capitol at Washington.

Yet, when the chance arrived, he did none of these things. He did not even come down to the town which had sprung up as a result of his discovery. Instead, he lingered in the mountains, continuing to "bach" it, solitary and alone, in the little cabin which he had run up with his own hands, living as simply and abstemiously as in the days when he had not a dollar to his name.

The habits of a lifetime are not to be shaken off without an effort, and when it came to the test, poor old Billy found that he could not wrench himself free from the ways which had become as much a part of him as his vague, halting manner of speech or the ever-questing glance of his mild, blue eye.

A stooped, pathetic little figure, with a dreamy, abstracted air and a hacking cough; this was about all the denizens of the camp knew of him. Where he came from, what was his history, why he had originally taken to his lonely career, were questions that no one could answer; for he gave to none his confidence—to none, unless it might happen to be Jim Hart, whom, on account of the latter's legal knowledge, he had called in frequently of late for advice on various details of his enlarging business.

Yes, a greatly enlarged business; for, with a shrewdness hardly to be expected from one of his type, old Billy let slip none of the advantages of his great find. All the best claims were recorded in his name; almost all the ore being got out was on leases granted by him; the one real mine of the district was his—the famous "Gladys B.," the development of his original strike.

And now the fortune which had come to him too late to be of any use must pass to another. As in the fable, the gold he had sought so long slipped, no sooner than he had grasped it, from between his nerveless fingers. It was another instance of the irony of fate.

On all these things Hart mused somewhat bitterly as he strode along the trail; for he was not blind to the moral of the story. But as he reached the outskirts of the camp, he shrugged his shoulders and flung back his head with a familiar, reckless gesture.

"After all," he muttered into his beard, "old Uncle Billy ought to have lost out. He was like that guy in the Bible who took his talent and buried it in a napkin. With more money and power than any man between here and Denver, he was content to live in that wretched old shack up there among the pines, and even cook his own meals.

"I'll bet," and again that enigmatic light flashed into his eye, "the next owner of the Gladys B. plays a different kind of a hand."

It was almost sunset when Hart had started out upon his journey, and by the time he reached the village, Lame Creek was already starting on its nightly round of wassail.

From all directions the miners were hurrying toward the Waldorf-Delmonico, the principal resort and apology for a hotel. Its low-ceiled barroom, flaring with the light of a dozen smoky kerosene-lamps set in front of huge tin reflectors, resounded to the rattle of chips and the animated hum of voices, while eager crowds surrounded the two faro-tables and stretched along the rough board counter, behind which stood the shirt-sleeved proprietor, Dan Groesbeck, busily engaged in serving drinks.

On the way thither, Hart encountered several men he knew; but he merely passed them with a curt salutation, reserving the message he bore for more public announcement.

It had been his intention to stand in the doorway of the Waldorf-Delmonico, and dramatically proclaim his news. Usually at his entrance there was a pause in the diversions, and every eye was turned toward him; for he was a leader of the camp in a way, the settler of most disputes, the one to whom the rest looked up to on account of his education and talents.

Accordingly, he had felt that this would be the fitting and psychological moment to make known the grim tidings with which he was charged.

But to-night, for some reason, his appearance did not create the usual flutter of interest. Scarcely a single man turned his head. All of Lame Creek which was not gathered about the faro-tables seemed to be engrossed with a tall, slender young man, a stranger, who stood at the farther end of the bar, closely hemmed in by a curious throng of auditors.

Hart hesitated a moment; then, deciding that the occasion was not yet ripe, and that he needed more of a spotlight for the effective disclosure of his intelligence, somewhat sulkily pushed his way to the bar and demanded a drink.

"Which is it?" questioned Dan Groesbeck, with a jerk of his head toward the shelf whereon stood his stock in trade—two big demijohns labeled respectively "Slow Death" and "Sudden Death."

Hart was seized with an inspiration. "I guess I'll take 'Sudden Death,' Dan," he said; then, as he filled his glass, he added, raising his voice:

"Yes, I'll take 'Sudden Death.' It seems, in a way, more appropriate, after what has happened."

There was no reason now for him to complain of a lack of attention. Outside of the peculiarly significant tone he had used, the fact that Hart had changed the tipple he invariably affected was sufficient to draw every glance in his direction.

Even the impassive faro-bank dealers halted their monotonous flipping of the cards and raised their heads.

"What is it, judge? What's gone wrong now?" queried a dozen excited voices.

Hart, having his audience safe, however, waited before gratifying their curiosity to drain his glass, and set it back upon the bar.

Then he turned to the breathless throng.

"Boys," he said, "Uncle Billy Burke has passed in his checks."

"What?"

"You don't mean it?"

"How did it happen?"

A shocked and startled chorus met Hart's declaration. Scarcely a man there had enjoyed more than a mere bowing acquaintance with the old recluse; but he was the founder of their little community, the opulent owner of the Gladys B.; and the news of his sudden demise affected them all profoundly.

"Yes," the lawyer nodded back to the ring of dismayed and incredulous faces, "it is so. The old man died in my arms not more than an hour and a half ago. You know how weak those spells of coughing always left him. Well, he had a particularly severe one this afternoon, and, failing to rally from it, passed out. Luckily, I happened to drop over that way on my road down from the mine, and thus was able to be with and soothe him in his last moments."

There was a brief silence when Hart had finished—a brief period, while the men let the startling news slowly soak into their intelligence; then some one in a low voice asked the question which was uppermost in the thoughts of all:

"And who, now, will be the owner of the Gladys B.?"

Before Hart could answer, the Whiffet, a rat-faced little individual, wearing his hat on one side, and always very much in evidence on all public occasions, interposed a smothered exclamation. Wriggling back through the crowd, he seized upon and dragged forward the young stranger standing at the end of the bar.

"Jedge," he apostrophized Hart, with a wave of the hand toward his confused and blushing quarry, "here's some one that I calkilate has about ez much interest ez ary one else in this here information you've just been disseminatin'."

Hart's eyes narrowed, and he regarded the slim, manly figure in front of him with strong disfavor.

"Ah," he inquired coldly, "how so?"

"Why," explained the Whiffet eagerly, "this is pore old Uncle Billy's nephew, his sole survivin' relative. He was jest a tellin' us, when you come in, how he'd traced out that Uncle Billy was his uncle who'd disappeared from their old home in Vermont many years ago, an' how, havin' some business out this way, he'd concluded to look the old man up, an' resoom friendly relations as it were. He never suspected, though, that the late lamented had struck it rich; an' when we told him how the Gladys B. was pannin' out, he was clean flabbergasted.

"But, excuse me," the Whiffet went on, "I'm fergittin' that you two hain't been interduced yit. Judge Hart, let me make yer 'quainted with Mr. Henry Sardon, of Denver."

Hart made no attempt to acknowledge the introduction. He merely looked the other over with a quizzically contemptuous glance.

"Humph," he grunted. "Did you come here on the strength of a rigmarole like that?"

His tone was so openly offensive that the other instantly stiffened, and the crowd uneasily started to scatter in view of a possible gun-play. But the stranger restrained himself.

"I do not think you understand," he said quietly. "You probably believe me one of those needy adventurers who always appear in the wake of any big discovery with a claim of relationship to the discoverer."

"And aren't you?" drawled Hart.

"No," disclaimed the other vehemently. "I am a mining engineer from Denver, and my business out here, if you care to know it, is to examine into and report upon some properties in this locality.

"Having learned, some time ago, upon unquestionable evidence, however, that an uncle of mine who dropped out of sight before I was born, was identical with Billy Burke, a prospector of this region, I determined, while I was in the neighborhood, to look him up, and see if I could do anything for him.

"You may, consequently, imagine my surprise when, upon making some inquiries here to-night, I was informed that the man I sought was the owner of the sensational Gladys B."

"Never dreamed, of course, that you were letting yourself in for a good thing?" sneered Hart, and the crowd, accustomed to take their cue from him, burst into a guffaw.

The stranger flushed angrily, and started to retort in kind; then bit his lip, and caught himself together.

"Look here," he said, turning to Hart with a winning smile, "I am not going to quarrel with the man I just heard telling how he had held my poor old uncle during his last moments. Besides, I can't blame you for feeling skeptical. I would, myself. But, if you will suspend judgment till to-morrow, I think I can convince you of the truth of all I say by indisputable proofs."

"Proofs?" Hart snapped his fingers. "What do I want to see your proofs for? You ought to have got here in time to show them to Uncle Billy. Or, I see—" with a nasty change of intonation. "You expect, now, to step into the old man's shoes on the strength of this alleged relationship, eh?"

His overtures of friendship spurned, the young man realized that, for some reason, he had aroused Hart's enmity. Henceforth, it was evidently to be war between them.

He looked in the lawyer's eyes. "Yes," he said; "since you put it that way, I, as next of kin, am undoubtedly his heir."

A light of vindictive triumph flashed into Hart's dark eyes.

"Well, you're not," he declared; "for Uncle Billy made a will, just before he died, leaving the Gladys B. and everything else he owned to his only daughter, Miss Gladys Burke, of Chicago. I'm on my way now to Overton to telegraph her to come out and take possession!"

CHAPTER III.

HAIL TO THE QUEEN!

THERE was grumbling in Lame Creek loud and long when it was learned that

the "Hairess," as Miss Gladys Burke, of Chicago, had by this time come to be known, was not to put up at the Waldorf-Delmonico.

The entire camp had planned to give her a welcome fitting the occasion; and Dan Groesbeck, with an eye to business, had sent to Overton for an extra faro-dealer, and ordered a fresh barrel of each of his two styles of stimulant.

But Jim Hart, who had charge of the arrangements for her reception, uncompromisingly set his foot down upon the preparations.

"No," he asserted positively, "there are going to be no prize-fight features about this performance, and Miss Burke isn't going to be lodged up over a gin-mill, either. She is a lady, you must understand, called out here by the sad and solemn business of her father's death, and she isn't going to be upset and annoyed at the end of her long journey by the unwelcome attentions of a pack of unkempt coyotes.

"I have instructed the stage-driver," he added, "to drop her at her father's cabin up on the mountain, and I shall not even myself intrude upon her privacy until she has had a chance to get settled."

"In the old man's cabin!" exclaimed Dan Groesbeck, still smarting under the aspersions cast upon his hostelry. "You sure ain't fixin' to stick no lone female up in that out-of-the-way dog-kennel without no one so much as to say howdy-do to her?"

"The place will be fixed up and made as comfortable as possible," replied Hart calmly; "and, for the rest, Wunna, the squaw, will be on hand to attend to all her wants. I am sure she would prefer that to being met with a whoop and hurrah by an insane set of bedizened chimpanzees."

This last with a scathing glance toward the Whiffet, who had already started in to sport a flaming red necktie and a pair of lemon-colored kid gloves, in anticipation of the approaching event.

Perhaps the reasons he gave were all that actuated Hart in his decision; perhaps he had others which he kept to himself. At any rate, he held firm to the stand he had taken.

Neither prayers, entreaties, nor expostulations were able to move him, and in the end Lame Creek had simply to swallow its chagrin and forego the honors it had hoped to shower upon the new queen.

In this emergency the Whiffet, after a day spent in mourning, finally hit upon a brilliant inspiration. Because the mountain was not coming to Mahomet, was, he argued, no reason that Mahomet could not go to the mountain. In other words, what was to prevent the enthusiastic populace of Lame Creek from ascending to Miss Burke's shanty on the night of her arrival and paying their respects.

This suggestion broached in due course to every man in the camp save Hart and the stranger from Denver, met with high approval, and plans were instantly laid to carry it into effect.

Of the two kept in the dark, Hart's exception was, of course, for fear that he would frown upon the project; while the young mining engineer, Henry Sardon, they did not consider strictly one of themselves. Anyway, they had been inclined to look askance at him, since the lawyer, their leader, had cast a doubt upon his claims.

Sardon, however, although he could scarcely fail to recognize the feeling entertained toward him, seemed to be but little troubled by it. His business was not with them, but with the golden treasure locked in the hills round about, and it was apparently a matter of complete indifference to him whether they liked him or not.

After satisfying himself that the will presented by Hart was legal and valid in all respects, he had, beyond appearing at the funeral, made no further attempt to assert his kinship with the old prospector; but had busied himself solely with his own affairs.

Lame Creek saw him hardly at all; for although he still lodged at the Waldorf-Delmonico, he joined in none of the noisy symposiums in the barroom. Up with the sun each morning, he would spend the entire day roaming over the mountains, tapping at the rocks with his little hammer. He returned late at night, his bag of specimens over his shoulder, too tired and sleepy to do anything but tumble into bed.

Still Lame Creek had an idea that he was not lingering there solely to pursue his investigations, but was waiting for the appearance of Miss Burke upon the scene, when he would again urge his pretensions. With this suspicion in their minds, he fell into still greater disfavor, while predictions were freely made as to what would happen to him if he sought to stir up any trouble for the "Hairess."

So, the days passed on, with the camp on the *qui vive* of excitement, until at last arrived the eventful Thursday marking the advent of the new owner of the Gladys B.

At five o'clock in the afternoon Jake Long, the stage-driver, reined in his foaming steeds in front of the Waldorf-Delmonico, and immediately found himself almost mobbed by a clamorous throng.

"Yes, she has came," he finally announced when he could make himself heard above the storm of eager questioning. "Dropped her at the old man's cabin O. K., and turned her over to Wunna. An', say, boys, she's ez purty a piece of goods ez I ever handled in my life. Ez purty, an' ez sweet ez—"

Words failing him, he dived headlong for the bar, and in his abstraction swallowed two full tumblers of "Sudden Death" before he remembered that no man save Pete Jenkins, the local tank, had ever taken that amount at a single draft without afterward throwing stones at his own house.

Indeed, as he turned from the bar, he felt sure that the fiery potion was already starting to get in its deadly work; for, to his amazement, the crowd which a moment before had been thronging so closely about him was nowhere to be seen. It had vanished completely.

"Oh, that's all right," Dan Groesbeck assured him with a laugh. "The boys has simply skinned out to git into their best bibs an' tuckers, an' make ready fer a little social call we has on the carpet fer to-night.

"An', by the way, Jake"—a note of impatience creeping into his voice—"s'pos'n' you quit blinkin' yer eyes, an' peerin' 'round like a owl in the daylight, an' beat it yerself. I gotta close up this shebang, ef I 'spect to have any chance to make my own twilight."

Such a washing and dressing and rummaging over of scanty wardrobes as there was within the next two hours! Grimy faces were scrubbed until they fairly shone, tangled locks were "slicked down" to such an extent that the very air reeked of bear's grease.

The man who possessed a "b'iled" shirt was an object of envy; and when the Whiffet proudly appeared in a frayed and rusty frock coat, such was the feeling aroused that, if anybody else could have got into it, that paragon of fashion would have been denuded in ten seconds, and a free fight engaged upon for the prize.

By seven o'clock, however, everybody was ready, and the camp, marshaled into line, started for the trail.

Ordinarily, Jim Hart could not have been kept in ignorance of their undertaking. His keen eyes would have taken note of their extensive preparations, and his shrewd mind detected the purpose they had in view.

But to-day he had fish of his own to fry, and he had paid but little heed to what was going on within the camp.

Betaking himself to the mountains about noon, he had hid himself behind some bushes along the trail, at a point whence he could gain an unobstructed view of the old prospector's cabin. He had there maintained a watchful vigil, until at last he had seen the stage stop, and a slim, girlish figure alight to pass within the door under Wunna's protection.

Then, carefully screening himself from the cabin's observation, he had hurried back by another path to his own bachelor diggings, and from that time on until sunset was as busily engaged as any of his fellows in effecting an elaborate toilet.

Nor, as he gazed at his reflection in the square of looking-glass nailed to the wall, did he feel that he had any cause to be ashamed of the result.

His broad-shouldered, stalwart figure was set off to excellent advantage by his pioneer garb of belted trousers tucked into high-topped boots, and soft, blue flannel shirt, above whose collar and loosely knotted neckerchief rose the shapely pillar of his throat, the strong, bearded jaw, and his dark, handsome

face, with its devil-may-care, black eyes. Involuntarily, he bestowed a nod of approval on the reflection, and a smile which showed his perfect teeth; then, with a glance at the clock, he snatched up his hat and was off.

It was about fifteen minutes after his departure that the assembled forces took up their somewhat irregular march, and, as he traveled at a faster gait than they, he had covered almost half the distance up the mountain before he became aware of their sortie.

Then, as he rounded a ledge and gazed back along the way he had come, he beheld down in the valley below the twinkle of a score or more of lanterns, and could make out the confused, straggling line negotiating the ascent of the first slope.

An enraged oath burst from Hart's lips. His eye flashed, and his brow grew dark.

It was no part of his plan to have the meeting between himself and Gladys Burke witnessed by a motley horde, neither did he care to stand aside and let them go on without him. He wanted her this first evening of her arrival for himself alone.

Hart hesitated a moment; then, stepping around the corner of a huge rock which jutted out across the trail, he waited until the vanguard of the approaching host had almost reached him.

Then he stood suddenly forth and, with folded arms and scowling gaze, barred the way.

"What does this mean?" he demanded roughly.

The Whiffet, who, on the strength of his imposing attire, had been jauntily acting as leader, almost turned a back somersault at the unexpected appearance of the lawyer.

"Why, jedge," he stammered. "Why, jedge, we was—"

Then the words stuck in his throat, and he could only stare white-faced and goggle-eyed at his questioner.

"What does this mean?" Again Hart's deep voice boomed forth.

This time Dave Richards, one of the strong men of the camp, took it upon himself to answer.

"We've started out to call on Miss Burke," he said.

Then a dozen other voices chimed in.

"Yes, we decided to pay our respects to her in a body, an' tell her that she's welcome to Lame Creek. Thar ain't nothin" wrong about that, is thar, jedge?"

Hart sneered mockingly.

"Nothing wrong? Oh, no. It's only enough to scare her out of her wits to see such a *Falstaff's* army as this come loping out of the woods."

Then his mood changed, and he waved an imperative arm down the trail.

"Turn right around and go back, every one of you," he commanded angrily. "Didn't I tell you that Miss Burke was not to be intruded upon until I gave the word?"

But this did not at all suit their humor. Was all their holiday planning and preparation to be wasted?

For an instant they wavered, so accustomed were they to accepting Hart's orders; then their faces grew sullenly rebellious, and a storm of mutinous murmurs arose.

Big Dave Richards, pushing the Whiffet to one side, took the lead, and a dozen brawny fellows ranged up by him, making ominous show that they were ready to contest the right of way by force, if necessary.

Hart quickly saw that he must compromise. His very leadership itself was threatened, and if he was to gain anything of his desires he must at least hold them in partial control.

"Oh, very well, then," he said, with a shrug of his shoulders. "If you are bound, bent, and determined upon going, don't let me interfere. The trail is free to all, I suppose, and I have no right to dictate whom the lady shall or shall not receive. I merely thought that she would naturally be fatigued to-night, and would much prefer to sit quietly and learn something of her inheritance and of conditions here, rather than to meet a whole raft of strange people whom she did not expect to see.

"I may be entirely wrong about this, though," he admitted, dropping into that persuasive tone which was one of his chief assets; "and she may be just as eager to meet and make friends with her new neighbors as you are to welcome her.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," as though

just struck by the suggestion. "You chaps wait here, while I go ahead and find out what her wishes may be. I know none of you want to force yourselves on her against her desires; yet, on the other hand, it would be a shame to waste all the trouble you have taken, and go back home, if she is really anxious to meet you. So, just wait here. I'll not be gone longer than three shakes of a dog's tail."

Ah, this was the Hart they knew—affable, complaisant, one of themselves. Instinctively, they swayed once more to his bidding.

"All right, jedge," they shouted. "We'll wait fer you; but don't let her turn us down. Promise that you'll give her a game of talk for us, jedge."

"Never fear," he shouted back over his shoulder, for he was already hastening up the trail. "Never fear. I'll plead your case as strongly as if it was my own."

And he meant it, too; for if things went right in the half hour that he would have her to himself, what difference did it make how many others might come afterward.

Indeed, if things went *very* right, he wanted the crowd there; for it would give him a chance to make an unexpected announcement, to enjoy one of those dramatic moments which were to him the salt of life.

His heart athrill, therefore, his brain teeming with plans and hopes, he hurried on up the path, and at last stood panting at the cabin's door.

In response to his knock, Wunna appeared and, with a mere stolid grunt of recognition, help open the portal.

The interior of the cabin was greatly changed since the occupancy of the old hermit; for Hart had bundled all its former belongings out to the trash-heap, and, making a special trip to Overton, had supplied their places with the best that money could procure.

Handsome skins and gaudy Indian blankets now covered the washed and scoured walls and floor. A dainty set of furniture and a comfortably pillowed couch had superseded the rickety chest of drawers, the shaky table, the broken-backed chairs, and the huddled shakedown.

From the rafters overhead swung by delicate chains a graceful silver lamp, but it was not lighted to-night, for the warm, red glow of the wood fire on the open hearth furnished all the illumination the room needed.

Hart had no eyes at that moment, however, for any of these things. His glance was centered upon the slender figure in the gray traveling dress. The girl had risen from a seat by the fire, and now, with outstretched hand, came forward to greet him.

A sudden hunger swept into his gaze as it rested on her sweet face, with the big violet eyes, and the pale, cloudy masses of blond hair above her level brows. Struck by something peculiar in his manner, she paused irresolute, and half drew back.

"Is not this Mr. Hart?" she questioned.

For answer he stepped into the full glare of the firelight, and lifted the broad-brimmed hat from his head with a sweeping gesture.

"Gladys, don't you know me?" he said.

The tone fell familiarly upon her ears, and she peered at him more intently. Then one hand fluttered to her breast, and she recoiled, her eyes wide with startled apprehension.

"Guy Washburn!" she gasped.

CHAPTER IV.

HER GIRLHOOD'S LOVER.

SIX years before, when Guy Washburn was a young lawyer just starting in practise at Chicago, he had boarded at the home of Gladys Burke's mother — nay, rather had been taken into the household as a member of the family.

In this way he came to know of and discuss with them all their affairs, and was frequently called upon to advise them in questions of domestic management.

Mrs. Burke, indeed, found him of great help to her; for she was a widow, and often felt herself in need of masculine counsel.

That is, as Washburn learned soon after coming to reside with her, she was a widow in every respect except for a

grave upon which to strew flowers on Decoration Day.

The late Burke — or, to speak more correctly, the *probably* late Burke—William by name, had, it seems, failed in business when Gladys was a mere baby two or three years old, and, with that fatuous confidence in which men regard it as easy to dig the precious metals out of the ground without previous experience or apprenticeship, had set forth to recoup his fortune in the gold-fields of the West.

For a time letters and remittances arrived regularly from him; then both, especially the latter, appeared at longer and more infrequent intervals.

He was working into a wilder country, he explained, where mails were often hard to catch, and where those that did go through were apt to fall a prey to the Indians; but young Washburn suspected, after a perusal of some of these epistles, that the wild, free life was laying a stronger spell upon him, gradually loosening the ties of home and kindred.

Then, at last, the letters ceased altogether. Mrs. Burke waited for double the usual length of time, hoping against hope for some word, until finally, becoming seriously alarmed, she wrote to his last point of address to make inquiries.

After some delay, a message came back, stating that Burke, with a companion named Sardon, had started out on a prospecting tour late the previous fall, and that since that time nothing had been heard from either of them. It was possible, the correspondent pointed out, that they might have continued their journey in the spring on up into the unexplored country to the north; but the likelihood, he was forced to confess, was that both had perished in the winter's snows.

What was Mrs. Burke to do? She was a lone woman, without money to prosecute a search, and she had a little daughter dependent on her for support.

The problem of existence was there to be met and grappled with face to face; so she opened a boarding-house, and, meeting with fair success, managed in time to scrape together a modest competence.

A kindly, energetic woman, with a faded prettiness, she was when Washburn came to know her, the last person one would suspect of harboring unavailing regrets or sentimental fancies.

Yet, as he progressed into intimacy with the family, he learned that the question as to whether her husband might not still be alive remained, even after fifteen years of silence, a very vital matter with her, and she was continually wondering whether she ought not to use the little money she had saved in an effort to trace him.

The young attorney vigorously dissuaded her from any such course. Her husband was not only presumed by the law to be dead, he argued, but was more than likely so in fact.

It was not in the nature of man, he insisted, to keep silence for so long, or without cause practically to desert a loving wife and an only child.

Within fifteen years Burke must either have gone broke, or struck it rich, and in either case she would have heard from him.

On the other hand, the perils of frontier life, the unusual hazard of the expedition upon which he had started, and the fact that his correspondence had ceased just at that time, formed a chain of circumstantial evidence almost conclusively proving his demise.

It was idle, Washburn told her, to cling to the fancies she was entertaining, or to dream for a moment of squandering the little heritage which should rightfully go to her daughter in a vain and bootless enterprise; and so well did he urge his views that Mrs. Burke, at last convinced of her widowhood, purchased a veil forthwith and went into weeds of the deepest and most somber dye.

After that his landlady made a point of consulting him whenever a troublesome question arose in her affairs, and he thus came to know the exact condition of her resources.

At this time Gladys Burke was a girl of eighteen, fresh and fair as an opening rosebud, and with a head full of sentimental fancies and romantic moonshine; and Washburn—plausible, handsome, and engaging—served as a trellis upon which to hang all her girlish dreams and all her ideas of knightly chivalry.

Nor was he indifferent to the appeal of her shy, violet eyes, or the exquisite color which came and went upon her rounded cheek. He fell in love with her; there can be no doubt of that. No man with a drop of red blood in his veins could resist the charm and sweetness of Gladys Burke in her gracious maidenhood, and Washburn had more than a share of the crimson fluid in his arteries.

The mother saw how things were going, and was well content. If she could have had her choice, there was no one who could have suited her better as a son-in-law.

So, in due process, the two young people became engaged, and it was arranged that the marriage should take place as soon as Guy became a little better established in his profession.

Everything looked favorable for their future. He had started to dabble in politics some little while before, and now received the appointment to a post under the city government which was not only charged with considerable trust, but would serve as a means to his advance.

Gladys selected her bridesmaids, and began to prepare her trousseau.

And then came the crash!

An honest and inquisitive district attorney, rooting around through the records of some transactions which seemed a shade peculiar, unearthed a trail of graft which grew broader and more manifest the farther he followed it, and which eventually led him to explode a sensation, convulsing official Chicago from center to circumference.

Among those gathered into the net and placed under indictment was young Guy Washburn. On the eve of the day set for his wedding he found himself lodged in jail, deserted and betrayed by the precious gang of rascals he had been willing to serve.

When Gladys and her mother came to see him, he, of course, vigorously protested his innocence, declaring that he was the victim of a conspiracy; and they believed him.

The proof against him was so absolute and certain that he had found it impossible to obtain bail; but the faith of these two women in his integrity never wavered.

Gladys offered to marry him right there behind the bars, if he wished it; and pledged herself to stand by him, no matter whether he was convicted or acquitted; while Mrs. Burke mortgaged all her resources to the last penny, and even went to the point of pawning her few beloved jewels to obtain the money for his release.

Yet, despite this generous sacrifice, Washburn seeing no way to avoid the verdict he felt sure was coming, fled on the day before the trial, leaving his trusting benefactor to hold the bag; and, what was worse, he fled with a girl who had been Gladys's best friend, and was to have acted as principal bridesmaid at the wedding.

His victims made no effort to pursue him. They accepted the result without outcry or complaint to the world, and, although it practically beggared them, paid their obligations to the court to the uttermost farthing.

Prostrated by the treacherous blow which had been dealt her, however, Mrs. Burke did not recover. From that time on she failed steadily, and a year later Gladys turned away from a new-made grave with the bitter feeling that here was another loss to be charged up to the already full account of Guy Washburn.

Yet the girl did not mope or repine, nor permit the shadows which had fallen upon her youth to darken her entire life.

Bravely she took up the work of a music-teacher, and, cheerily struggling away, managed to support herself, and even in time to forget in great measure the sorrow which had fallen to her lot.

Then, like a bolt from the blue, came the startling news that the father she had so long supposed dead had but just passed away, and in dying had left her the heir to a well-nigh fabulous fortune. The tidings came to her from a lawyer named James Hart, and, according to his instructions, it was necessary that she come out at once to the little mining town where her father's career had ended, and there take possession of her property.

She had lost no time in obeying the mandate.

Packing up merely a few necessaries, she had started without delay upon her journey, her head awhirl with excite-

ment, a thousand possibilities arising from the new position thronging into her mind.

It was hardly natural that she should feel any grief for the father she never remembered having seen, and who had remained contentedly oblivious of her existence all these years. Rather were her thoughts bright and happy over the unexpected relief which had come to her from arduous toil, full of anticipations and plans concerning what she would do with her newly acquired wealth.

She had been delighted, too, upon her arrival, with the place set apart for her abode — the little cabin up among the whispering pines—and with all the arrangements made for her comfort.

Wunna, the squaw, with her silent effacing of self, interested and amused her, and she felt as though she could never grow tired of gazing at the grand views from her aerie — the carpeted lower slopes, the picturesque valley, and the thronging peaks with their changing wealth of color.

After supper she had thrown herself in sheer content into a chair beside the fire to dream and arrange in her mind a flood of new impressions, while she waited for the arrival of her late father's legal adviser and custodian of the will.

And then the door had opened, and she found herself suddenly standing face to face with her girlhood's faithless lover!

Ah, what poignant memories came back in that second! What different thoughts were in the minds of those two as they stood gazing into each other's eyes!

CHAPTER V.

GOADED TO CONFESSION.

"GLADYS, don't you know me?" repeated Hart.

Yet, even while he spoke, he knew that the question was an idle one. That she knew him was evidenced only too plainly by the hand clutching at her heart as though to still its agonized beating; by the stare of her violet eyes, wide with incredulous horror.

Recovering herself by an effort, however, she sought to conceal the symptoms of her agitation. She clenched her hands at her sides and drew herself up with an assumption of scornful dignity.

"Why are you here?" she demanded, when at length she felt that she could control her voice.

"I am James Hart."

Again she fell back a pace in wondering amazement. It had never occurred to her to connect his coming with that of her expected caller.

She had never for one moment suspected that he was the lawyer who was to acquaint her with the provisions of her father's will.

"You, James Hart?" she exclaimed. "You, Guy Washburn?"

A light smile flickered over his lips.

"It is not considered good form in this country," he said, "to inquire what name a man may have previously borne, or to mention it if you happen to know it."

Then, as he saw that this attempt at flippancy jarred on her, he added more directly:

"Let Guy Washburn rest in the grave of the past. I am James Hart."

A sudden suggestion flashed upon her, and impulsively she flung out the challenge:

"I don't believe you."

Once more he laughed.

"That is a matter easy of proof." He turned to the Indian woman, crouching silent in the corner with her eyes upon the floor. "Wunna, who am I?"

The squaw surveyed him with impassive eyes.

"Big Weasel," she answered laconically.

"Yes, I know; but what is my paleface name? What do they call me at the camp?"

"Jedge Hart," responded Wunna, making it a single word, and turning her soft, low guttural into an imitation of the "boys'" strident, nasal twang.

"You see." Hart turned back to Gladys with a vindicated wave of the hand.

But the girl had never really doubted his assertion; she had felt instinctively all the time that it was so. Her denial had been thrown out more as a desperate hope than as a belief to which she gave any support.

Now, with even this weak prop gone,

she could only shrink back and give vent to a tremulous "Oh!"

A hundred terrifying doubts and apprehensions crowded in upon her. Recalling this man's perfidy and baseness in the past, she wondered if it were possible that he had lured her out there under false pretenses?

It might readily be that there was no inheritance awaiting her; that the whole story of her father's death had been a fabrication cunningly devised to trick and draw her away from home and friends.

Could the ruthless malignity of even a fiend go so far? Alas, she was forced to confess that there was scarcely any evil she was not ready to believe of Guy Washburn; and certainly all the circumstances of her arrival seemed to lend point to her suspicions.

This lonely cabin far away from other human habitation, the only companion granted her the stolid Indian woman, evidently his tool and slave, his own odious presence. What else could it mean save that she had walked into a trap?

Helpless, aghast, she yet felt that she must not give way. She must control her emotions, betray none of her palpitating fears, play for time, and strive with all her woman's wit to extricate herself.

Nerving herself to the rôle, therefore, she endeavored to assume an air of cool indifference.

"Be it so, then," she said icily. "And since you are James Hart, a stranger whom I never met before, will you not be seated and discuss the business which brought you?"

Hart, however, was too shrewd to be deceived by her acting. He had seen the pallor deepen on her cheek, the swift glance of horror she had cast about the room as though seeking some way of escape; and, grasping the thought which lurked back in her mind, he hastened to reassure her.

"You are wrong, Gladys," he said gently. "And you need have no fear of me. Whatever Guy Washburn may have done, James Hart is acting throughout this entire matter absolutely on the square. Set your mind free of all doubts. You have not been deceived in coming out here. You are a great heiress, and my sole purpose in calling on you tonight is to bid you welcome to Lame Creek and to turn the property over to you."

There was a ring of truth in his voice which compelled her attention.

"It is so," he repeated. "Or, here, you can convince yourself."

He drew from his pocket a copy of the will and a bundle of deeds to mining claims, leases, etc., and handed them over to her.

Untutored in business details though she was, Gladys could not but recognize that these were genuine, and a great wave of relief surged up in her heart. After all, the peril which had driven her so nearly to the verge of panic had only existed in her own fears.

Nevertheless, she abated nothing in the stiffness of her manner, nor would she concede to him by even so much as an appreciative glance that he had rid her of any alarm. If he had expected her to be softened by his avowal, he was destined to disappointment.

"Thank you," she said simply when she had inspected the papers to her satisfaction. "And now is there anything else you have to tell me about my affairs?"

He noticed that she did not again offer him a seat, nor did she sit down herself; but stood with her hand resting on the back of a chair, as though to indicate that the interview was to be as brief and businesslike as possible.

Her formal, perfunctory tone nettled him, and he took a hasty step toward her.

"Yes, I have much to tell you about your affairs; but that can wait. Tonight I want to talk to you about myself."

"I do not care to hear it. Remember, you are to me James Hart—a perfect stranger."

He ground his teeth at the rebuff. Time was passing, and the "boys" would not be willing to wait much longer.

Presently they would be along to find out why he had not returned. He resolved to risk a bold stroke.

"Gladys," he murmured, throwing into his voice a passion of tender appeal, "can't you forgive and forget? I love you. I have always loved you alone!"

She drew back as though stung, and

for a moment lost the rigid control she was holding over herself.

"Love!" she cried hotly. "You dare to speak to me of love? Where is the woman for whom you deserted me?"

"Alice? Oh, I supposed you knew. She died within six months after our marriage. But I never really cared for her, dear. It was a sudden infatuation, a piece of mad folly. You, and you alone, have always had my heart."

He believed now that he had solved the real reason for her coldness. She had been jealous of the other woman.

"Come," he pleaded, extending his hand, "let us forget all the mistakes and lapses of the past and start anew. Won't you make up and be friends, Gladys?"

But she had again gained command of her feelings, and she met his fervid supplication with only an impatient frown.

"I think I have already indicated the limitations for any intercourse between us, Mr. Hart," laying emphasis upon the name. "If you have no further matters of business to present to me, may I not remind you that I am very tired and ask to be excused?"

He was not to be turned aside from his purpose, however. Persistence, he reflected, often wins the battle.

"But, Gladys," he urged, "won't you give me a chance to explain, to justify myself in your eyes? I love you, dear. I want to win you for my wife!"

She was growing weary under the long strain, was sickened by his continued importunities. With a sudden flash of her violet eyes, she turned upon him.

"Your wife!" she cried. "Your wife! I gave you a chance to let the disgraceful past rest in its grave. I was willing to hold such formal relations with you as might be necessary upon a new basis. Since you will not have it so, however—since you insist upon resurrecting all that I would willingly forget—then take your answer.

"Your wife!" Her tone was surcharged with scorn. "I consider the very word upon your lips an insult when addressed to me. I hate and despise you. I would not marry you, if you were the last man on earth. Coward, criminal, murderer!"

She flung herself back, her eyes ablaze, like a tigress goaded into fury, and pointed with her arm to the door.

"There, you have your answer," she finished. "Now, go!"

Hart winced under the lashing strokes of her contempt; but still he did not stir. He seemed to be spellbound, fascinated.

"I see how it is," he burst out hoarsely. "You think I do not love you; that if you consent, I may jilt you again. But I can give you proofs of my devotion."

"Proofs of your devotion!" she mocked.

"Yes, proofs. Criminal you have called me, and I am one; but I have been a criminal to serve as well as to injure you. This fortune which—"

He broke off confusedly and bit his lip.

"The fortune!" she gasped, her eyes dilating as she glanced swiftly down at the papers on the table and back at him. "Are you trying to intimate to me that there is anything shady about it?"

Then, as he continued to hesitate, she brought her little clenched fist down upon the table with a vehemence which sent the documents sprawling, a confused mass, upon the floor.

"Is there anything shady about it?" she repeated. "Answer me!"

"Yes, there is," he confessed sullenly. "I hadn't intended to tell you; but you have practically forced me to it, and now you may as well know the whole truth. Old Billy Burke was no more your father than I am, nor have you legal claim of any kind upon his estate. I forged the will by which you became his heir!"

(To be continued.)

WELCOME.

So glad the word of greeting,
So sweet the kiss and smile,
That parting, for such meeting,
Were almost made worth while.

George Alison.

WHEN THE MOON DANCED.

By EPES WINTHROP SARGENT.

A theatrical story of a desperate venture and an electrician's revenge.

"'TIS a hot night," commented Briggs, the boss carpenter, meaningly.

"Gives a man a fierce thirst," added Joe Ridd, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

To both statements Jim Adrian returned an absent-minded assent. From their tones he gathered that an affirmative was required, but he did not realize what they were saying.

The dress rehearsal had been long and trying, and Jim Adrian had his own problems to face—not the least important of which at the moment was the decision as to whether he would purchase a glass of beer or ride home?

He concluded that it would be best to save the spare nickel that represented either, but not both of these luxuries, and with a pleasant "good night" he disappeared through the stage-door, by which Briggs and Ridd followed him to join the rest of the stage-crew of the Theater Superb waiting in the alley for their delegates.

"Not a copper penny did he give us," reported Ridd to the expectant "grips." "What d'yer think of a guy what holds a dress rehearsal on a Sunday night, and then don't cough up the beer money?"

Their opinions were picturesque but unessential, and they added to their first impressions as they headed for the back room of Reilly's.

"I guess he doesn't know," suggested Briggs charitably. "It's his first show, you know."

"*And* his last," added Ridd. "The book's punk. The music ain't so bad, and it's easy to get a good company this time of year; but that book! Say," he added, his face clearing of its gloom, "I got an idea that'll get us hunk with the darned tightwad. It'll put the bloody show on the blink."

"That ain't right," protested Briggs. "This chap Adrian's got every penny he has in the world up in this piece. The skindikate wouldn't touch it, so he hires the Superb and puts the show on himself. He's got nerve, all right. I heard his dame tell Miss Mountfort that she pawned everything but her wedding-ring to put in the pool."

"Then he ought to have the price of the beer," retorted Ridd. "Look here, fellers, the show ain't going to last anyhow, and the theater's to be torn down. It isn't like we was risking next season's job. Tell Mike to bring another round—it's on me—an' listen here."

Monday evening Jim Adrian paced the stage, set for the first act of his musical comedy, pausing now and then to peer through the peep-hole at the auditorium. In a stage box sat Mrs. Jim, trying not to look as though everything depended on the reception accorded the play.

Ridd watched the author with grim amusement. Usually Ridd was the last out of the saloon and the last into the theater; but to-night he was at his post among the first, for, in spite of Briggs's protest, the plan of revenge had been approved.

It was nothing to them that much depended upon the success or failure of the play. It was nothing to them that the house that represented Jim's savings, the furniture, the wedding presents, and even Jim's beloved books, had been mortgaged to raise the money for the production.

They could not know that "Turvyland" was a part of the Adrians' very existence. Jim had planned the plot on their honeymoon eight years before. The dialogue had been polished by a score of revisions, and Mrs. Jim had written the music to the songs.

Manager after manager had refused to read the book or hear the music played, and at last they had decided to prove their faith in their work and make their own production. Theaters are to

be had for small rentals after the regular season closes, clever people are willing to play for half salary rather than none at all, and Dave Faulkner, proprietor of the Superb, had let them have the house for little more than the cost of the lights and stage and house crews.

The theater had been sold for three times its value, to be razed by the city, which had planned a municipal building on that block, and Faulkner could afford to be generous. Moreover, he had a real liking for Jim Adrian, who, as dramatic reporter for the *Globe-Herald,* had done him many a good turn.

The house filled slowly. Even chronic deadheads are loath to accept free tickets with the mercury climbing above the eighties, and when the musicians prepared for the overture the house was scarcely half filled.

To Jim, peering through the peep-hole, the people out front seemed to wear the look of mourners at a funeral.

"It's *got* to be a hit," he whispered to himself as he pressed the button for the orchestra.

The light on the leader's desk flashed, and dispiritedly they began the medley overture of airs from the first act.

On the stage the chorus people were taking their places, but there was none of the nervous bustle of the usual first night. The girls moved languidly; and Casson, the comedian, standing in the opposite entrance, seemed the embodiment of gloom.

There was a mild burst of applause as the music stopped, to start a moment later with the opening chorus, and even the curtain seemed to suffer from the enervating heat as it slowly ascended. Myra's sprightly music sounded funereal as the chorus sang it, and Casson droned the dialogue, setting a tempo the others followed.

To Adrian it seemed hours before the cue for the act's end came; and he was glad when, a moment later, the key bumped softly on the stage and the butchery of the play paused for a few minutes.

The stage hands alone seemed not to suffer from the general lassitude, but sprang to strike the scene and make ready the second act: the courtyard of the palace in Topsy Turvy, capital of Turvyland. The set was a handsome one, the palace on one side showing a rich landscape in the distance, with the ripple of the moon on the water and a cascade effect. Myra had written a serenade for the opening number that was the best song in the score, and Adrian was regarding the scene hopefully as Faulkner came on the stage to cheer him up.

"Not so bad," lied the house manager glibly. "The weather is against you, and your people are loafing shamefully; but the songs are good, and the lines, too, when Casson takes the trouble to speak so that you can hear him."

"How about the boys?" questioned Adrian, referring to the critics. "Did they say anything?"

"They are coming back for a part of the second act. There's a chance yet that you'll catch them," said Faulkner comfortingly; but Adrian shook his head. He was an experienced member of the death-watch himself, and he knew the signs.

Only a miracle could save the play now. Already he was planning how best to meet the poverty that he had brought upon Myra and himself. The little house they had bought with their savings, with its tiny garden that had been Myra's delight, would have to be given up. They must go back to some cheap boarding-place and start all over again.

He did not mind for himself—but it would come hard on Myra.

Faulkner hurried back to the lobby to herd the newspaper men into the theater, and presently Adrian flashed the signal to the orchestra and called to Ridd for the lights.

Ridd, the revengeful, smiled an evil smile as he threw the current into the sciopticons that produced the effects, and the curtain-rings rattled against the guide-wires as it went swiftly up.

Adrian expected a "hand" on the picture as the curtain rose, but he was unprepared for the yell of delight that was the first spontaneous expression of the evening. An instant later he understood and stared, too horror-stricken to speak.

Everything seemed to have gone wrong. A cascade of crimson water leaped from the pool straight up to the top of the rocks, while a green moon

reeled drunkenly through a purple sky. Huge fish instead of birds swam or flew through rainbow-colored clouds, and the rocks which masked the bottom of the drop heaved as the waves of the sea.

The set trees, beneath which the chorus was grouped, swayed as though in a hurricane, and the shriek of the wind-machine and the patter of the rain-box punctuated the music, though the skies were clear.

"Something the matter with the lights. Shall I throw them off?" asked Ridd. "The boys must have got the wrong mediums for the sciopticons."

"This is the only laugh they have had. Let them have it out," said Adrian wearily.

The day was lost. Nothing could save the play now. At least, he would not cut short the fun.

The rain-machine stopped and the wind died down as the serenade ended, and Adrian touched Casson's arm as he stood waiting to go on.

"You might as well add to the riot," he said in a dead tone. "Guy the lines if you want to," and Casson, whose listlessness had killed the first act, went on with a joyous countenance.

He won a laugh with his first speech, a quip about the Irish moon, and he laughed himself a moment later when a shriek from the wind-machine echoed the laughter of the audience. That, in turn, won another laugh, and the actors took heart.

Presently they were playing Adrian's lines, but giving to them the spirit that had been lacking. Gosford, dean of the critics and the terror of playwrights, stopped squirming in his uncomfortable chair, and once he laughed outright.

Faulkner saw him, and went back on the stage to tell Adrian.

"It's bully," he whispered. "I didn't know you were going to work the scene this way. It's natural that in 'Topsy Turvy' the things should all go wrong."

"They did," admitted Adrian. "It was more of a shock to me than it was a surprise to you. The only thing to do was to keep on kidding, and it seems to have won out."

Faulkner glanced sharply at Ridd.

"I think I'm wise," he said quietly. "Mike, the barkeep over at Reilly's, was telling me that the boys were planning some trick on you because you did not give them beer money last night. He didn't know what the game was."

"I didn't have beer money to give," confessed Adrian. "I wanted a drink myself, and couldn't spare the nickel."

"It's champagne for yours after this," cried Faulkner. "Lipsky dropped in to see me, and he wants it for the Auditorium. Better close with him. He'll give you the big end, for he wants it bad."

"He can have it," promised Adrian with a happy laugh. "We'll keep this stuff in and call a rehearsal in the morning. I'll move the serenade down a bit to get it away from the laugh, and I think the piece will do."

Faulkner nodded his approval and disappeared for a time, but he was on the stage again when the curtain fell.

"Hold your men, Briggs," he commanded to the boss carpenter as the crew cleared the stage for the night.

Jim turned to meet Myra, all smiles and tears.

"It's a hit, Jim," she cried with a laugh and a sob. "All of the boys told me they liked it, and Mr. Gosford says that last act is an inspiration. You never told me you were going to do it that way. When did you change your mind?"

Jim motioned for silence, and a look of comprehension came as she listened to Faulkner's crisp tones.

"You fellows ought to be ashamed of yourselves," he was saying sharply. "You should be kicked out of the theater and out of the union you have disgraced. Because Mr. Adrian was too busy with more important matters to remember your beer money you set out to kill his play. It's not your fault you did not succeed.

"I'm ashamed of you, and you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Mr. Adrian feels differently about it, though, and he authorizes me to announce that you'll each find an extra twenty-five dollars in your envelopes this week. Here's twenty dollars for immediate use, but remember that there's a full scene rehearsal tomorrow at ten-thirty.

"You fellows are going to sweat all summer," he added with grim humor.

"It's one thing to light a moon box, and quite another to keep it swinging for an hour and ten minutes eight times a week. That goes double for the geniuses who originated that wave effect with the set rocks. You fellows didn't know that you were going to be hoisted with your own petard."

Shamefacedly the crew slouched out of the theater, with the exception of Ridd, who went over to Adrian.

"I'm sorry I done it," he said simply.

"I'm rather glad," answered Adrian. "You grouched me into a hit, Ridd; and both Mrs. Adrian and myself are obliged to you."

"You ought to be grateful," commented Faulkner as the electrician followed the rest over to Reilly's. "Ridd's revenge was the biggest boomerang in the history of theatricals. Let's get after the eats, and drink Ridd's health. He doesn't deserve it, but we'll do it just the same."

JUST FOR SPITE.

By ROBERT CARLTON BROWN,

Author of "Honors Heaped High," etc.

How friends fell out over an ax on the eve of an election, which was in consequence attended by more than the ordinary acrimonious incidents.

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.)

CHAPTER I.

EXCHANGING LABOR.

MRS. HICKS was so friendly and intimate with Mrs. Pierce, and Mrs. Pierce was so taken with Mrs. Hicks, that either would have loaned the other her false puffs in an emergency.

The children of both families were on such a chummy footing that they chewed each other's gum. Thus were the two families cemented together.

One moving-day in May, Hicks kissed his wife good-by before taking the suburban train for the city, and asked if he could do any shopping for her.

Producing the proverbial sample, the wife made the usual request, and her husband looked quite as glum as the glummest.

"Hurry—hurry! There goes Pierce! I'll miss my train," he muttered absently, backing toward the steps.

"You'll remember it, John. Quarter of a yard, fourth floor, the girl with the celluloid collar and brass medallion."

"Yes, yes," he assured her. "Fourth of a yard on the quarter floor, the girl with the brass collar and celluloid medallion. That's easy. Anything else?"

"Oh, yes, John, there was something else. Let's see—what was it now? Something about the house, I'm sure." She bit her lip, furrowed her forehead and crossed her eyes in a desperate effort at memory.

"Another gas-mantle?" suggested the husband wearily.

"Oh, yes, get a couple more—they do break so easily; but—but that wasn't it. There was something else," she repeated, rushing out on the porch and holding him back by the lapel.

With an indulgent smile, Hicks stood fidgeting. At length his wife broke out, releasing him:

"Oh, well, never mind. I'll think of it again, and you can get it Monday."

"Thanks," he murmured, hurrying down the steps and trotting across the lawn to catch up with Pierce, who stood waiting for him, meanwhile examining with his foot the loose boards in his front walk.

"Needs a little repairing, Dick," commented Hicks, as they walked away together.

"Yes; and that rotten pear-tree there must be chopped down, too," added Pierce, ruefully pointing at an unsightly dead tree in his yard, bordering on the party-line.

"To-day's Saturday. Why don't you get busy and put in the afternoon on

your yard instead of at the ball-game this afternoon?"

"That's what I'm going to do," said Hicks. "Now that you're pretty sure of being the president of the beautiful and pleasant suburb of Oak Forest, you ought to set an example to your constituents by having the best lawn in town."

"Say, that's a good scheme. I'll get all fixed up for election day. Besides, that family I was telling you about is coming to look at the place next week. They'll rent it for July and August if it looks good to them, and I don't like to leave it vacant while we're away this summer, so I guess I'd better fix it up so it'll be sure to please them."

"Tell you what I'll do," began Hicks.

"What?"

"My porch is settling. I've got to get a lever under it and put a few bricks in to hold the post. What do you say to exchanging labor, as farmers do in the harvest season?"

"Good scheme," enthused Pierce.

"We'll catch the one-five, and do both jobs this afternoon. It'll make the work pleasanter, and two can always do more than twice as much as one, anyway."

Talk diverted into other channels during the ride to town.

"Spooner was over again last night to make a last appeal for me to run against you on the ticket," remarked Hicks.

"It's mighty good of you, John, to let me have a clear field. We'll stick to the agreement. You help elect me president this year, and I'll turn about and help you in next year. There's nothing like a close corporation."

"Sure, Dicky," answered the other. "I guess it would take a pretty big thing to sever our friendship. I don't think there's ever been any jealousy between us; and we never had a fight."

"No, we've been pretty lucky," replied Pierce. "Wait till I'm president of the village. We'll have a new asphalt road on our street, you can bet on that, and we'll buy an automobile together."

"That'll be fine."

The friendly suburbanites caught the one-five train for home together, and an hour later they appeared in ragged trousers and shirt-sleeves ready for work.

On Hicks's suggestion that they should get the easiest job done first, they tackled the task of raising his slumped front porch.

For half an hour they gathered planks and hunted bricks, in the effort to form a lever.

"Let's trade off like this every Saturday afternoon," suggested Hicks, enjoying the novelty of the work, and feeling a sort of satisfaction in knowing that the bothersome porch was to be finished up and off his mind.

"Might be a good scheme," acquiesced Pierce, with a shade of doubt, glancing at his still-standing pear-tree, and wrapping his handkerchief around a fresh blister.

Another half hour of toil passed.

At last Pierce's mechanical ability had constructed a lever that would lift Hicks's porch.

Hicks was sitting on it, while Pierce, on his knees in the mud, sawed at the ragged bottom of the post; for Pierce had taken manual training at school, while Hicks had elected free-hand drawing, and just now he rather prided himself on his choice.

"If you work as hard as president of the village as you are on this job you'll make good, Dick," encouraged Hicks, as he held down the lever and watched his bosom friend sweating below.

Pierce made no answer, but shoved in the bricks with an unaccustomed viciousness.

Ten minutes later, his face, grown apoplectic from the exertion, turned right-side-up, and he rose from his cramped position with a look at Hicks which suddenly brought that gentleman down from his heaven of oblivious serenity.

"There! That fool thing's done," growled Pierce, giving the saw a vicious swing under the porch and wiping the drops of perspiration from his eyebrows, in order to distinguish the hands on his watch.

"Three-thirty!" he gasped, glancing at his sidewalk and the scrawny pear-tree.

"Well, we'll have to hustle some," agreed his neighbor, who had done nothing but hold down the lever. Then he looked down at the job. "I guess there'd

better be another brick under there, Dick. But, here, let me fix it. You take the lever for a change, and I'll try to manage the brick, although there's nothing mechanical about me."

"Except that satisfied smile," grunted Pierce, in a quite unneighborly tone.

"Now to the pear-tree!" cried Hicks.

He had wondered at Pierce's grumpiness, and determined to pitch in on the other job, and show that he was no shirker.

"Yes, we've got a few more minutes left," grumbled the other, endeavoring to rub back a misplaced arm muscle.

"Oh, come, Dick. Don't be so grumpy," smiled Hicks, picking up a hammer. "You go and hunt up your ax for the pear-tree, and I'll pull up the rotten boards in the walk while you're gone."

Pierce shuffled toward his cellar-door, sucking a bruised thumb; and Hicks, it now being his turn to show neighborly zeal, began furiously ripping up the planks, pulling part of the rotten stringers away with them in his ardor.

When the owner of the walk returned he found but little planking left over which to exert his proprietorship.

"How's that?" beamed the energetic Hicks. "Now, we're all ready for the boards."

"It's all right," was Pierce's comment, "if we have time to get the boards in. But if we don't I'll have to show the family who thought of renting my place your house when they come, or the deal will fall through. Looks as though a crazy man lived *here*—instead of next door," he added cuttingly.

"Oh, come on, Dick. I—I did my best, and we'll have time to finish," retorted the other, crowding down his resentment.

"Maybe you did," admitted Pierce grudgingly. "But if you did, your best is pretty poor. That's all I've got to say."

"It's quite enough," rejoined Hicks, as he picked up Pierce's ax.

The man who was running for the presidency of Oak Forest took up a spade and began digging around the roots of his pear-tree.

Neither said a word. Both glanced away when their eyes happened to meet.

Pierce mumbled to himself, as he wrung the perspiration from his hair and watched out of the corner of his eyes as Hicks hacked amateurishly at the roots of the tree.

His mumbling sounded something like this: "Fool, getting me to do all his work, and then coming over here and making my place look like a chicken-yard."

On the other hand, Hicks growled to himself as the ax slipped for the tenth time and took off a corner of his shoe: "Fool, getting mad when a fellow tries to help him out. It's a cinch. I'll never try this exchanging labor stunt again."

A triumphant look passed over Pierce's face as he saw the ax slip again and take off another piece of Hicks's shoe.

Hicks caught the look. He was suddenly spurred to madness and, raising Pierce's ax high in the air, he brought it down with all his unskilled force.

Crack!

The ax handle hit the tree and broke off short; the head whirred through the air, and just missed Pierce's ear.

Pierce dropped his spade and faced the crude workman with a particularly venomous and angry glare.

"Trying to kill me, or what?" he demanded.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIGHT IS ON.

HICKS started to answer back. Then he clenched his teeth and fists in a manly manner, got control of himself, glared for a second, and then parted his teeth just long enough to snap: "I'll get my ax!"

With head down, he doggedly marched to the rear of his own house.

There he stopped and called:

"Bertha! Bertha!"

His wife put her dusting-capped head out of an up-stairs window and answered:

"What is it, John?"

"Where's the ax?" growled the head of the house.

"Oh, that was it, John," beamed his wife.

"What was it?" snapped Hicks.

"Why, that was what I wanted you to

get down-town this morning, and couldn't think, don't you remember? Harry broke it the other day, and I tried to remember to tell you to get another this morning," explained the housewife.

"Why—why the deuce *didn't* you remember it? You women never remember anything until—until it's too late," replied John surlily, as he retraced his steps and reached the pear-tree empty-handed.

"Well?" queried Pierce, surprised at seeing him return without the ax, and taking it as a personal affront.

"Our—our ax-handle is busted too," stammered Hicks. "I—I guess we'll have to quit."

Pierce flashed him a look of scorn and doubt.

"Suppose you went back and broke it on purpose so you could get out of your share of the work."

"What do you mean?" cried the other, losing his head at the insult.

"It didn't take you long to break the ax-handle," began the other.

"What do you mean—that I'm lying to you?" gasped Hicks.

"Oh—no—nothing of the kind. Only I'm sorry you had to break your ax-handle to get out of the work. You might have saved yourself a lot of trouble and merely said you lost it," and Pierce glared at his erstwhile bosom friend.

Hicks was bubbling over and could not speak.

"I'll thank you to get me a new ax-handle," said Pierce suddenly, dropping his spade and turning toward his house.

"I'll not get you an ax-handle. I broke it chopping down your fool tree," snorted Hicks.

"You mean—*trying to,*" Pierce corrected, over his shoulder.

"Oh, well, have it your own way," sneered Hicks, hurrying up his repaired porch and slamming the door.

It is over just such trifles that friends fall out.

"Well, Pierce and I had a fight," announced Hicks, when his wife questioned him as to his sudden appearance on the scene.

"Mercy—no!" she cried.

"Well, that's the case, and—"

"And Mrs. Pierce and I were going to entertain the card-club together next week."

"I guess it's all off," said Hicks.

"But the prizes are bought, and we have written some of the invitations."

"Can't be helped."

"Couldn't you make it up?"

"Bertha"—and he fixed her with a stern eye—"do you think I'd knuckle under to that miserable cheap skate? Why, he even told me to replace the ax-handle I broke for him chopping down his pear-tree."

"Oh!" as she wrung her hands. "Then it's all because I forgot to tell you to bring home a new ax-handle?"

"Yes, the women are at the bottom of everything," sighed John Hicks, as he proceeded to the kitchen to wash his hands of Dick Pierce and the dirt collected from pulling up Dick Pierce's sidewalk.

A little later the door-bell rang.

"Harry!" cried Mrs. Hicks to her youngest boy, "answer the door, will you? Sarah is busy."

Harry went to the door, and suddenly Hicks heard a plaintive little voice:

"My father said I wasn't to speak to you."

Hicks recognized the voice of Mary Pierce, his former friend's youngest daughter.

Hicks rushed to the door.

"What is it, Mary?" he asked kindly.

"Here's your old dripping-pan and the half-dozen eggs mama borrowed last week."

She handed him the cooking utensil and the eggs, and then disappeared quickly.

Hicks stood dazed. His wife rushed to his side and looked up at him wonderingly.

"Do we owe them anything?" he asked.

"Why, yes. I borrowed Mrs. Pierce's waffle-iron, and a cup of cream, when we ran short last night."

"Harry," said the proud parent, "take back the waffle-iron and the cup of cream to the Pierces'; and—mind you—don't speak to any of the Pierce children."

Thus was war declared.

"Mary stuck out her tongue at me," wailed Harry, when he returned.

"Such manners!" ejaculated Hicks. "Don't you let me catch you doing anything like that, young man."

Before dinner that night the home-made telephone that John Hicks, Jr., and little Richard Pierce had rigged up between the two houses was suddenly disconnected at both ends.

"Bertha! Is that your clothes-line?" asked Mr. Hicks, looking out of the kitchen window, and noting a line that stretched across both back yards.

"Yes; but, John, we have always used it together. It's much easier."

"I'll have Sarah take it down," was the laconic reply from the lord of the house.

An hour later the line was down.

The two houses lay close together, so that one dining-room looked into the other. It was the long-established custom to leave the shades up at dinner, and after the meal the four little Hickses and the three little Pierces stood in their respective windows and signed to each other in play, until the entertainment grew tiresome, and then they joined in a frolic on the lawn.

But the night of the quarrel both dining-room shades were down; and each house head was laying down the law to his children, and telling them they were to have nothing to do with their little playmates next door.

Mrs. Hicks and Mrs. Pierce both mourned for the card-party. They were not so relentless as the men. Neither could give a party so well alone, for by pooling their possessions in one house the splendor of the occasion would be more than doubled.

When the children had gone to the play room after dinner, being denied the outdoors that night, Mrs. Hicks suggested in a soft voice:

"Don't you think you had better get Mr. Pierce a new ax-handle, John?"

"Don't I think—" exploded the head of the house. "Bertha, you surprise me. That sullen mule, with a perpetual chip-on-his-shoulder air. Not if I know it."

"But you have been such friends—"

"Yes. Till I found him out."

"And the card-party—"

"That's it. Card-party! That's all you women think of. There is a serious side of life as well. A man must have a little family pride, a little dignity—a little knowledge of the proprieties of things. Bertha, you surprise me."

Being unable to make any headway except in the direction of surprising her husband, Mrs. Hicks subsided, and accepted the inevitable—still regretting the card-party.

Half an hour later Hicks growled:

"When Spooner came around last night to try for the hundredth time to force the nomination on me I was a fool not to accept. Little did I know Pierce then. He's not fit to be the president of so fair and quiet a village as Oak Forest. He'd turn the town upside down in three months with that fighting faculty of his."

"But you wouldn't want to run against him?" began the good wife soothingly.

"Wouldn't *I?*" Hicks doubled his fist and glared.

"Well, thank goodness, it's too late for that, anyway," sighed Mrs. Hicks.

"Yes. But I'll do all I can to fight him at the election. Although, if the other party puts up one of the old trustees, I'll have little chance—they're all in such bad repute."

"But you'll get over this quarrel," Bertha Hicks tried to assure him.

"That's the woman of it. Bertha, you surprise me."

Again Mrs. Hicks subsided.

The door-bell rang.

"Mr. Spooner to see you, sir," said Sarah, poking her head into the dining-room a moment later.

Hicks looked at his wife. There was triumph in his eye, and his fist was still doubled.

"John, John"—she flew to his side, and rested a warning hand on his shoulder—"don't do anything rash. You know you promised to help elect Mr. Pierce, and he was going to turn around and get you in at the next election."

"I can see Pierce helping me. Every man for himself is my motto from this night on. All bets are off after the way he acted this afternoon. No man gets thanks in this life for helping a friend."

Hicks grew so epigrammatic and statesmanlike that his wife knew the futility of further argument.

Taking a box of cigars under his arm, Hicks walked into the parlor to receive Mr. Spooner, campaign manager for the non-partizan party.

There was a doleful look on Spooner's

face. He looked as though he were about to recite, "Who Killed Cock Robin?"

"We've got to have you at the head of our party, Mr. Hicks," the manager began.

"Well, I've been thinking it over."

"Good!" cried Spooner, brightening and jumping into the gap. "A man with your force, a man of your mental caliber, a man with the capacity for work you have—that is what the resplendent suburb of Oak Forest needs, and will have. It is your duty as a citizen. I have been urged by the people to make a last attempt to-night. The people want you, Mr. Hicks. You are the logical man for president of the village."

Hicks puffed up like an animated puff-ball.

"When my country calls I shall not be found wanting," he said facetiously.

"Then I may go out and spread the news that John Hicks will head the non-partizan ticket against Dick Pierce on the citizens' ticket?"

"You may. I am your candidate. I pledge myself to carry the non-partizan party through to a flying finish," said John Hicks, in his grandest manner.

CHAPTER III.

THE ELECTION.

THE next day both candidates were busy with the managers of their parties.

The election was very near at hand, and this was the last Sunday for the politicians to do their work.

Pierce learned early that morning that his former bosom friend had decided to run against him. With the ax-handle incident rankling in his bosom, he put all of his energies into the fight against Hicks.

Sunday was spent by both candidates in making personal calls on their friends and acquaintances, for the purpose of gaining votes.

Each party had an automobile out, and during the afternoon the two opposing crowds crossed paths. The occupants of both machines spoke to each other, all except Pierce and Hicks, who glared with their lips firmly set.

The election was to take place on Tuesday, and the non-partizan people had their hands full, for their candidate had just been selected, and there was little time in which to work up interest in him.

But John Hicks was popular, and they banked a good deal on that. He had a winning way with him.

Pierce, however, had been a candidate for the citizens' party for ten days, and the advertising he had received in that time had put him far ahead in the race.

Next morning Pierce and Hicks took the same train as usual, but instead of sitting together, or even acknowledging each other's presence, each formed the center of two opposing groups of politicians.

Hicks felt that he had the better of the quarrel, for more reasons than one. The people who had intended to rent Pierce's house for the summer had chosen the day before for their call, and Hicks noticed that they looked at the uprooted sidewalk, the rotten pear-tree, and then went away. He rather gloated over the fact that he had done Pierce that much damage.

The supreme test now would be the election. The quarrel would be decided by that; one man or the other would get the upper hand.

Spooner came through the smoker, and took a seat among his colleagues of the non-partizan party.

"Well, boys," he began, "we did good work canvassing yesterday. If we'd only had Hicks to head our ticket a little earlier, it would have been a walk-away for us without a doubt."

"You don't anticipate any trouble now, do you?" queried Hicks.

"Well, it's just like this. You're pretty popular with our bunch, but Pierce has a good many friends who have pledged themselves to vote for him before they knew you were in the race. Now that you're in, they probably would like to change their minds, but they've bound themselves to vote for him, and they'll stick by it."

"But I must win!" cried Hicks. "Think of the shame and everything. I couldn't let that fellow defeat me at the polls."

"But I thought you were such good friends," cried Spooner in surprise.

"We were," answered Hicks simply.

Another of the non-partizan gathering offered information at this point:

"A friend of mine said that he heard Dick Pierce say that all he regretted about the race was that he would have to run against the hottest-headed citizen in all Oak Forest."

"Did he say that?" cried Hicks, beside himself with anger in a moment, and making as though he would spring across the aisle and attack his opponent.

"That's what my friend told me; but politics brings out things like that, you know."

"This is a case of something more than politics," answered Hicks, throwing out his jaw and glaring across the aisle at his neighbor.

Both of the candidates returned to Oak Forest earlier than usual that afternoon. It was the day before election, and all the work must be done then, or not at all.

Hicks rode around in Spooner's motor, and Pierce traveled about in another, each making sure of all the votes he could.

"Well, it's going to be a close pull," said Spooner that night. "As near as I can figure, we've got a little majority; but the majority seems so small that, to tell the truth, I'm worried."

Hicks knew that his manager's sagacity could be depended on, and he did not sleep a wink that night.

According to ancient precedent in Oak Forest, neither of the principal candidates must be around the polls on election day. They always left their fate to their manager, and went about their usual work with a smiling face.

So Hicks and Pierce left their houses at about the same time, fifteen minutes before their regular train, in order to go to the polls and cast their votes and then journey on to town as though nothing had happened.

Quite a crowd of officials and "pluggers" were around the town hall, where the voting was to take place. They broke away and stood staring as the two principal candidates walked up the street, six feet apart.

Few people had learned of the enmity between Pierce and Hicks, so it was a great surprise when the two candidates drew up beside each other at the polls and asked for ballots without so much as a look exchanged between them.

"This is the funniest election we ever had, isn't it?" remarked one of the Pierce "pluggers" to Spooner, as they both stood by, watching the antagonists cast their ballots.

"Why? What's funny about it?" growled Hicks's manager.

"Why, the two of 'em are sore at each other, an' won't even speak. It's always been the custom at every election where I ever worked for the principals at least to speak to each other."

"Oh, I guess they spoke," said Spooner, trying to cover the quarrel.

"An' I guess they didn't. I've got eyes. I'll bet they'll be some dirty work done here to-day; each looks as though they'd do anything less than murder to get the other fellow's goat."

Before the two candidates had left the polls a great deal of gossip began to circulate. Everybody knew of the former friendship of the men, and the fact that they did not speak now aroused all sorts of curiosity.

Spooner pulled Hicks aside as he was leaving.

"Speak to Pierce," he advised.

"Why?" asked the other.

"Because it'll look better. You'll lose votes if you don't. We don't want people to think our candidate is a sorehead, that's what we don't!"

"Let them think what they like. I wouldn't speak to that scoundrel if I were certain of winning the election by just doing that one thing."

Evidently Pierce's handlers were having the same trouble with him, for they stood clustered around their candidate, urging him, in low voices, to do something.

But the two men left the polls without recognizing each other, and took seats at opposite ends of the smoker. There was no work in either of them that day. Both their minds were on the race for office.

Hicks sat in his office with the telephone-receiver at his ear all afternoon.

Spooner was keeping him informed at intervals about the gossip around the polls.

Pierce also sat close to his phone, and received information from his backers every few minutes.

The polls were scheduled to close at three o'clock.

Half an hour before that time both candidates were on the *qui vive*.

Hicks counted off the minutes until three came; then he received a call from Spooner.

"They've begun counting the votes," said Hicks's manager.

"Can't you give me some idea of how I'm coming out?" demanded Hicks, wiping the perspiration from his brow and disliking the cold feeling of it upon his fingers.

"Not a word as yet," was the reply. "You see, it's so blooming uncertain. The story that you two fellows weren't speaking got around, and seems to have changed a lot of votes. We tried to hush it up, but there was nothing doing. There will be a raft of split tickets on that account."

"Call me again the minute there is anything new," said Hicks.

He couldn't stay in the office. He was restless. He knew it would be half an hour before there would be another report.

Suddenly an idea occurred to him.

"Bertha reminded me again to-day to get that new ax-handle. I'll go out and get it now to fill in this chunk of time. I can't sit in this stuffy office."

So Hicks started out. At the hardware-store he suddenly saw a familiar figure. Hicks dodged back. The figure was that of Pierce, and Pierce was buying a new ax-handle to take the place of the one Hicks had broken for him.

Pierce recognized Hicks at that moment, and the two passed each other with a stare.

With the new ax-handle in his hand, Hicks rushed back to the office and called Spooner.

"I was just calling *you*," cried Spooner. "It's all over. The election was a *tie*. We've asked for a recount. We think on this we can throw out some of Pierce's votes. Some of the foreign element in town here voted for him, and there's generally something irregular to be found about a lot of their ballots."

Hicks was stunned. A tie! He could not understand.

Yet, Spooner seemed hopeful, and said there would be a chance for him on the recount.

The election was over. He could go home now and hear further particulars. Grabbing up his ax-handle, he ran for the train, and caught it just as it was pulling out.

Across the aisle he noticed Pierce, staring straight ahead with an agitated look.

Pierce looked over at Hicks. There was just the flickering of a sarcastic smile in each face as the men made out that each carried a new ax-handle and tried to conceal it from the other.

CHAPTER IV.

SUSPICIONS ARE RIFE.

BOTH Hicks and Pierce went directly home when they reached the station, doubtless to conceal the shining new ax-handles they carried.

It was strange that both had thought of the ax-handles at the same time and brought them home together. The humor of the situation, after what had gone before, would have appealed to them had they been less interested in their political fates.

Spooner called on Hicks a few minutes after he reached home, and at the same time, in the house next door. Pierce was talking over the election with his backers. It was the first time that Oak Forest had ever had a tie.

"Well," said Spooner, "I'm encouraged. It's a thousand per cent better than losing altogether, and we've still got a chance, you see. I believe that most of the foreign people in the east end of town voted for Pierce. They never know how to mark a ballot, and on the recount we can throw out those votes without any trouble. I saw several of them myself marked for Pierce that could be thrown out on technicalities. We'll get busy and fix them."

"When will the recount take place?" asked Hicks.

"First thing to-morrow morning. As the election judges themselves have demanded a recount, it can be made at once, and they will go over them again in the morning. Then we shall see—"

"What we shall see," finished Hicks.

They were silent for a few minutes.

"Where are the ballots now?" asked Hicks suddenly.

"They're locked up in the room where the election took place to-day."

"Are they safe there?"

"Sure! Didn't I say they were locked up? Besides, there's Pete."

"But that's just what was worrying me. Pete shouldn't have charge of the town hall. He's nothing but a drunken old reprobate. When I get to be president," said Hicks, "Pete will lose his lifelong job as engineer for the waterworks of Oak Forest."

"He's a fair worker —" began Spooner.

"When he isn't drunk. No, sir. I'm worried about those ballots. Pete is no protection; just because he lives in the top room in the town hall is what makes me afraid for the safety of that ballot-box. He always gets drunk on election night, and while he's away the other party might try to steal the ballots."

"They would hardly stoop to such a practise," smiled Spooner.

"It has been done," replied the man who thought he had a sure thing in the election-box as it stood.

"Well, Pete'll be all right. I'll go over and give him five dollars to stay around the hall to-night and not get drunk till to-morrow."

"Lot of good that'll do. He always has had a celebration with the boys on election night."

"Well, don't worry, Hicks. Everything will be all right. It's absurd to think that anything will happen to the ballots. It's a State's prison offense to tamper with them, you know."

At about the same time a similar conversation was going on in Pierce's house. Pierce was led by his backers to believe that on the recount next day he would be acclaimed the victor. This made him exceedingly timorous concerning the safety of the ballots. The victory would mean a good deal to him, and he could afford to run no risk.

"Couldn't they put them in the safety vault at the bank?" asked Pierce.

"Well, they could have," replied one of his backers, "but all that, you know, is up to the judges of election. They decided to leave them in the ballot-box in the room. The town hall is safe, Pete is on the job there, and everything will be all right."

"Pete! Yes, that's just the fault I have to find," cried Pierce.

Then he went on with an objection similar to Hicks's.

That night the influential men of both parties had meetings to talk over the result of the election. The meetings had been planned before, and both had had the idea that that night they would celebrate the victory of their candidate.

It was for this reason that the two little gatherings were not enthusiastic. So much depended on the next day that they could hardly give themselves up to smoke and eat and have a good time, as had been planned.

For this reason both parties broke up at eleven o'clock and went home.

Both Hicks and Pierce had been jollied all evening by their backers for the fear they expressed concerning the ballot-box in the town hall.

Hicks paced the floor for an hour after he reached home. He could not get the thing out of his mind.

Suddenly he made a resolution. Telling his wife that he wanted to get a little fresh air before going to bed, he put on hat and coat, secured a heavy stick, and sauntered out into the night.

Now, Oak Forest is a lonesome burg. Every self-respecting citizen is in bed at twelve, and there are none but self-respecting citizens in the town.

So Hicks felt something between a burglar and a murderer when he sauntered out at that unholy hour and sneaked along the silent streets in the direction of the town hall.

He merely wanted to be quite sure that the ballot-box was safe. One little glimpse of it through the window would satisfy him and allay his suspicions. Without that he felt that he could not sleep. The night before he had not closed his eyes, and this night he must rest.

So he stole along quietly until he made out the town hall ahead. It was a small structure. The power-plant for the water-works occupied one room; the meeting-chamber of the village fathers was next to this, and that was where the ballot-box reposed. Above was a little room where Pete slept.

The thought of Pete suddenly entered Hicks's mind. If Pete were at home and

on the job, as a little light in his room indicated, the engineer might hear him and take a chance shot at him in the darkness.

If he was discovered spying about, there would be a lovely scandal for Oak Forest, and on the eve of the recount, too.

Hicks decided that caution must be his watchword. He therefore sneaked up the alley through which the coal was delivered to the power-plant.

Everything was still; there was no light anywhere, except the dim glow of the lamp in Pete's room.

Hicks sneaked up close and edged along the building until he reached a point near the window that looked into the room where the election had taken place.

He flattened himself against the wall, and his heart pounded mightily as he held his breath and slowly drew up to the little casement.

There was just enough light so he could make out objects in the room dimly. He was very slow in locating the table where the ballot-box should rest, but suddenly it came into sight. Then Hicks's face broke into a smile. There was the box, intact. Right near the window it was; he could see it plainly. It had been so close to him that at first he had almost overlooked it in his eagerness.

Hicks gazed at the object long and earnestly. There was the box that was to give him victory over Pierce. There was the box that would settle the quarrel over the ax-handle. There was no doubt in his mind that he would win the election.

Everything was all right. He could go home now and sleep the sleep of the satisfied.

He slowly and carefully withdrew his face from the window, and was about to turn and retrace his steps when something in the other direction suddenly attracted him.

It was the crunch of a cinder. The crunching was repeated, a slow, suggestive noise.

Hicks stooped down beside the window and flattened himself against the wall.

Then he made out a figure coming from the direction of the noise. It was coming slowly, with a sneaking, catlike tread.

Hicks's breath came sharply. Something uncanny was about to happen, he was sure of it.

Who could this man be, and what was he doing in the vicinity of the precious ballot-box at this hour?

Questions poured in on Hicks's mind, and he clutched his stick nervously.

Evidently the oncoming man did not see Hicks crouching in the shadow, for he kept on his way slowly. Although Hicks could not make out the man's face, he was certain by his cautious air that the fellow had his eyes on the light in Pete's window above, and that this was why he had overlooked Hicks.

In a moment the man was only three feet away. Hicks's fingers tightened over the stick in his hands, and he made a sudden leap through the air.

"I've got you," he cried, as he bore the surprised stranger to the ground and forced the stick over his neck so that the man could not free himself.

There they lay; both breathing heavily, their faces close together, Hicks on top.

Hicks withdrew his face slowly to get a look at his catch.

"Great Heavens!" he cried.

He peered into the face of the man he had downed.

"Dick Pierce!" he cried.

"My God! Is it you, John?" came the answer from the man who had been taken by surprise.

"Yes. What are you doing here?"

"What are you doing here?" Pierce flung the question back as soon as able.

"I'm guarding the ballot-box."

"So'm I."

By this time Hicks had released his victim, and the two were standing up, glaring at each other.

"Better be careful, Pete will hear us," cried Hicks, looking up significantly at the lighted window above.

"I don't care if he does, I've done nothing wrong," cried Pierce quickly.

"The eagerness with which you say it would make anybody think you had planned to do—"

"Hold your tongue! It looks just as suspicious for you," answered Pierce hotly.

They continued to glare at each other for some minutes longer. Then both turned suddenly and walked toward home, on opposite sides of the street.

Their front doors slammed at the same moment, and both went to bed, but not to sleep.

Next morning the telephone rang at six o'clock, and awakened the Hicks's household.

"They couldn't have recounted the votes so early," cried Hicks, jumping into his trousers. "Something must have happened."

He rushed to the phone.

"Hallo—this is Spooner," came an excited voice from the other end of the wire.

"Yes—what is it? What has happened?"

"The town hall was broken into last night," came the reply. "The ballot-box was knocked over and broken open. The window near it was smashed."

"With what?" demanded Hicks.

"A new ax-handle," came the reply.

CHAPTER V.

THE COUNTER-CHARGE.

At seven o'clock one of Pierce's backers rushed up to the Pierce residence and frantically rang the bell.

Dick Pierce was summoned, and the excited backer told him the news in gasps.

"You say a workingman passed the water-works this morning and saw the broken window, then looked in and noticed the smashed ballot-box?" asked Pierce, hardly able to believe his ears.

"Yes. The window was smashed with a brand-new ax-handle," was the answer.

"A brand-new ax-handle!" cried Pierce, thinking of the meeting he had with Hicks coming home the night before, a new ax-handle under his arm.

It was perfectly clear in Pierce's mind. Hicks had slipped back during the night and smashed the ballot-box so there would have to be a new election.

He hurried into his clothes to accompany his backer to the water-works for a personal investigation.

As Pierce left his house, Hicks hurried down his own stairs with Spooner. The two pair of men met on the sidewalk. Spooner and Hicks spoke to Pierce's backer, while Pierce and his backer spoke to Spooner; but Hicks and Pierce eyed each other like fighting cocks, and their necks grew red with suppressed anger as they glared into each other's eyes.

At the town hall there was quite a crowd collected.

The door to the room containing the election box had not yet been opened, and the mob was gazing through the broken window at the ballot-box, beside which lay a shining wooden ax-handle.

"Why isn't the door open?" demanded Spooner.

"They're waiting for the judge of election," explained somebody in the crowd. "Besides, nobody's been able to wake up Pete yet."

Hicks looked up at the little room above; the light he had noticed at midnight was still shining dimly.

Several of the crowd were shouting to Pete in a vain endeavor to awaken him.

"He probably went out on a spree last night," suggested Hicks to Spooner.

"Yes," was the reply, "and that gave the citizens' party a chance to smash the ballot-box. Evidently they intended to get into it and remove a few of our votes so it would be their election on the recount; but something must have slipped up and the box smashed."

Then Hicks told Spooner in a low voice that Pierce had come home the day before with a new ax-handle, and that, to him, it looked very much as if Pierce had done the work himself.

"Did anybody else see him come home with the new handle?" cried Spooner, a sudden, strategic idea striking him.

"Yes. Three or four fellows were on the car."

"Get their names, and have them sign a paper that they saw Pierce with the ax-handle. We'll make capital out of this," replied Spooner enthusiastically.

"All right," answered Hicks, neglecting to tell his manager in his excitement that he, too, had carried home a new handle.

Suddenly the window in Pete's room was thrown open, and a frowsy head thrust out.

"What's up?" demanded Pete in a thick voice, having been aroused by the strenuous shouting.

"Thieves! The board-room has been broken into. The ballot-box is busted," explained somebody in the crowd.

"You don't mean it!" replied Pete, ducking his head back.

"He was out last night, all right," Spooner said to Hicks. "I gave him the five-dollar bill to stay home, but probably he just left the light burning to represent his presence, and then went out to celebrate."

"That's the way it looks, all right," replied Hicks.

"You'd better not wait, Hicks. You go and get those men who saw Pierce with the ax-handle. We've got to work that thing out; there's no time to lose. They may have some circulars printed before long that will throw the suspicion on us. We've got to get the goods on them first. There seems to be only one clue, the ax-handle; go after that, and get some evidence out of it."

So Hicks hurried away to hunt up the men willing to testify that Pierce had carried home a new ax-handle the night before.

Meanwhile Pete came down, shame-faced, and grinning sheepishly at those who knew his failings. Yet, underneath all that surged a sort of shifty-eyed fright that amused the onlookers who knew in what peril Pete's job always stood.

"Well, Pete, this is a nice mess, and you're responsible," said Spooner.

"I didn't hear a word. I was sleepin' sound. I worked so hard on election, sir. I didn't hear a word; never a word," cried Pete stoutly.

"Didn't hear a word!" repeated Spooner sharply. "Who thought there were any words? You must have been dreaming, Pete! What's the matter?"

"I mean, I didn't see a thing. I didn't see a thing," went on Pete with hysterical reiteration.

"We know you didn't, Pete," replied Spooner quickly. "The fault we have to find is that you neglected your duty."

"I did not. I was sleepin', sir. I never knew a thing had happened till this morning, sir."

"Better be careful, Pete. This may all be used as evidence against you. You know you've lied out of little things before, and that your job here isn't any too secure."

"S'elp me! I didn't hear a thing, sir. I went to bed at nine o'clock, sir, an' slept like an honest man."

"You're a liar!" cried somebody from the edge of the crowd. "Didn't Pen Ellison kick you out of his saloon at two o'clock this morning?"

A wave of red went over Pete's face. It was quickly followed by a sheet of white. Pete stood convicted. He knew he could not lie out of that, for the evidence was against him.

"Well, I'll throw up my job and go," he said, running a trembling hand through his unkempt hair and sticking out his ugly jaw.

"Oh, no, you won't, Pete," said a new voice, and a hand clapped down on the engineer's shoulder. "You'll stay till this ballot-box mystery is cleared up. You were supposed to guard it; you'll be an important witness. And, mind you, if you heard anything, you'd best tell about it right now."

The crowd swayed back a little as they recognized the judge of election, who had suddenly appeared before Pete.

"Well," said the engineer slowly, "I believe I did hear a little breakin' of glass durin' the night, but I was too sleepy to care."

"We'll find out all about that," replied the judge. "Now, we'll see what the damage is."

He unlocked the door to the board-room, and entered with Spooner, Pierce, and several other prominent citizens, Pete bringing up the rear.

Stepping quickly to the broken window, the election judge picked up the ax-handle and looked at it. The handle had been thrust through the window and had also crashed through the glass front of the ballot-box, knocking it to the floor and strewing the ballots about.

"Gentlemen, this is very serious," said the judge, holding out the ax-handle for inspection, "and this is all the evidence we have to work on."

"I saw Hicks carrying home that ax-handle yesterday afternoon," cried Pierce suddenly.

All eyes were fixed upon him.

"Can you swear that it was this identical piece of wood?" asked the judge in an awful voice.

"Well, of course," Pierce reddened and backed water, "of course, I couldn't be positive about that. But it was a new ax-handle, and it — it looked like that."

Spooner stood dazed. He had just heard Hicks accuse Pierce of carrying home an ax-handle, and now a similar accusation *from* Pierce caused him boundless surprise.

Deciding that it would be much better to say nothing until he saw Hicks again, Spooner kept his own counsel and listened while the election judge took up the argument.

"That is a very serious accusation, Mr. Pierce," said the judge. "A man can be sent to State's prison for tampering with a ballot-box. The election being a tie, offers a very good motive. I should hate to think that either of the principals in this election have sunk to such means in order to bring about the defeat of the other, but such seems to be the case."

CHAPTER VI.

A DOUBLE ACCUSATION.

By noon the story was all over Oak Forest. As the election had been a tie, everybody was certain that somebody had done some "dirty work."

At about one o'clock, Spooner and Hicks sent out a dozen little boys with big scare-head circulars, charging, as follows:

RICHARD PIERCE,

Candidate for President of Oak Forest on the Citizens' Ticket, was seen coming home last night with a new ax-handle under his arm, similar to, if not the same, one with which the window in the Board-Room was forced and the ballot-box broken.

Was that one of those strange circumstances that cannot be explained, or is RICHARD PIERCE guilty of tampering with the ballot-box, a CRIME for which a severe penalty is provided?

We put the question to you, MR. VOTER.

It is up to you to decide whether or not Justice shall be meted out and the VILLAGE OF OAK FOREST regain her fair name.

The subjoined testimony has been received from four of Oak Forest's prominent citizens who saw Mr. Pierce come home with the ax-handle.

Then followed statements from the four to the effect that they had seen both the ax-handle carried by Pierce and the one used in breaking the ballot-box.

The scandal caused by these circulars was overwhelming. The telephone-wires were kept hot in all directions transmitting the news and evidence discovered by the non-partizan party.

Hicks had done what he thought right. He did not like to attack his former friend in such a vicious manner, but the evidence was clearly against Pierce, and the people should know.

He was rather surprised, during the two or three riotous hours which followed the circulation of the startling announcement, that Pierce did not send in his challenge for a duel to the death.

But by four o'clock in the afternoon he understood why Pierce had not retaliated in that way.

Another set of boys ran around the town, their arms full of circulars.

Hicks rushed out and eagerly picked up the one thrown on his front porch. He had stayed home from work all day, as had most of the other politicians.

Hicks gasped as he noticed that the circular was almost a copy of his own, reading as follows:

JOHN HICKS,

Candidate for President of Oak Forest on the Non-Partizan Ticket, was seen coming home last night with a new ax-handle under his arm. The ax-handle was similar to, if not the same, one with which the window in the Board-Room was forced and the ballot-box broken.

It has been stated by the unscrupulous Non-partizan Party that our candidate, Richard Pierce, was carrying an ax-handle similar to the one used in the crime. This is erroneous. The ax-handle which Mr. Pierce carried home last night is of a different brand than the one found in the town hall this morning.

Both are on exhibition at Crossman's drug-store. We invite an inspection.

We also call upon JOHN HICKS to produce the ax-handle which he carried home last night.

He can't do it, we believe, for that is the one found in the Board-Room this morning.

No action has been taken in this case, as yet, due doubtless to the high standing of Mr. Hicks in the community.

We will, however, have action brought at once, if Mr. Hicks does not produce the ax-handle which five respected citizens of Oak Forest hereby testify they saw him carry home last night.

Hicks's eyes bulged out with fright when he read the citizens' party circular. It seemed stronger than the one he had sent out. In his desire to get even with Pierce, he had forgotten that he, too, had carried home an ax-handle the night before.

Rushing to the kitchen, he threw open the pantry-door and looked in at the corner where he had left the ax-handle the night before.

It was gone.

"Great Heavens!" cried Hicks. "What shall I do now?"

His forehead broke into cold perspiration, and he pulled open the door to the cellar.

A quick search showed him that the ax-handle was not there.

"*Gone!*" he cried, rushing around like a mad bull, and pulling things apart everywhere in the hope of finding what he sought.

"Bertha! Bertha!" he cried.

His wife answered from up-stairs.

"Where's that ax-handle I brought home last night?" demanded Hicks.

"Why, you left it in the pantry, John."

"Oh, I know that. I want to know where it is now."

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Bertha! You surprise me!" cried John Hicks, making another flying search.

"I'll be down in a minute and look for it, John."

The door-bell rang, and Mr. Spooner was announced.

"Have you got the ax-handle?" cried Spooner, clutching in one hand the circular printed and circulated by Pierce's party.

"Great Heavens, no! I'm looking for it," answered Hicks, beside himself with excitement.

"All is lost if you can't find it. Their charge has stirred up the town. We must do something."

"But none of the ballots were stolen or changed," objected Hicks. "How can it be so serious?"

"That doesn't matter. The election was a tie, and the box has been tampered with; the people are infuriated, and demand some sort of satisfaction."

Meanwhile Mrs. Hicks had instituted a careful search, and both Hicks and Spooner were flying around everywhere, looking for the ax-handle on which so much depended.

Suddenly the kitchen-door opened, and John Hicks, Jr., came in with a smile on his face.

His father made one leap for the youngster and grabbed something from his hands.

It was the shining new ax-handle.

"Saved!" shouted Spooner, dancing around on one leg in his excitement.

Without a moment's loss of time, Hicks and Spooner marched off for Crossman's drug-store with the ax-handle.

There a large crowd was collected, waiting for developments. They fell aside, and Hicks marched through triumphantly with John Hicks, Jr.'s, lucky find.

The handle was compared with Pierce's, and they were found to be of the same brand, while the one discovered in the town hall was of an altogether different make.

All three were placed on exhibition, and John Hicks went home happy. After dinner that night, Spooner called again.

"They've decided to take no action against us, and we've made up our minds to let Pierce alone. Both of you have produced your ax-handles, and there is no doubt that you are both innocent. The thing to do now is to find the real criminal."

"That's it," agreed Hicks; "and there's no doubt in my mind but that the citizens' party hired the man who broke into the board-room. I still think Pierce had a hand in it. You remember, I saw him sneaking around there at midnight."

"Yes, and he saw you," Spooner reminded him. "It would be unwise to give that fact any publicity, for it would make people doubt both of you."

"There's something in that," agreed Hicks.

"No; the thing for us to do is to hire detectives and prove that the other party tampered with the box."

"I've a notion that Pete knows a lot about it. Didn't you notice how queerly he acted when the judge of election was questioning him?"

"Yes, I believe we'll find out something through that channel. He may have been hired by the citizens' party to break open the box and fix some of the ballots so they would get the election."

"I'll bet that's it."

"But we can't have Pete arrested now. We haven't any proof. Besides, if we hire detectives, maybe something else will develop."

"I hope so. This thing is getting on my nerves. It's awful for people to suspect me and my party when we as good as had the election anyway. But you can't make these thick-headed villagers see reason."

"That's true," agreed Spooner.

"Possibly they'll hire detectives too," suggested Hicks suddenly.

"Well, that can't bother us any. We're perfectly innocent," answered Spooner.

"Are—are you quite sure that nobody in our party had anything to do with it?" asked Hicks, lowering his voice and looking around.

"Why, yes."

"I thought maybe some of the overzealous workers that were plugging for our ticket might have taken it on their shoulders to help us win."

"Of course not. None of our party would do such a thing. Hicks, I'm surprised at you."

"I just wondered, that's all. You see, I'm a little bit uneasy over this detective proposition. If they hire detectives, it will come out that I was around the town hall at midnight last night."

"Pierce was, too," added Spooner.

"It would be much better if that part could be hushed up," replied Hicks.

"Well, maybe they won't discover it. If they do, we'll simply come back at them with what we know."

"Oh, I wish I'd never got into this thing," said Hicks with great weariness.

"Come, cheer up! That's no way for our leader to talk. We've got to fight the thing out."

"When will there be a reelection?" asked Hicks.

"Probably in two weeks."

"Then they won't wait until this ax-handle mystery is cleared up?" queried the other.

"No. The village must have officers, and the law can take its course as soon as anything is found to work upon."

"Are you going to stay home from work to-morrow?" asked Hicks of his manager.

"Yes. I've got to be on the job. I'm going to take a day or two off and put detectives to work. This mystery must be cleared up."

"I'll have to get back to the office to-morrow," said Hicks. "This is our busy season."

"Well, you can trust to me to work in the interests of you and the non-partizan party," answered Spooner, offering his hand and bidding Hicks good night.

CHAPTER VII.

JUST FOR SPITE.

NEXT morning Hicks was at his office early. The accumulated work from the day before was soon despatched, and by noon he had time to think of the contested election and all the trouble he had found through breaking Pierce's ax-handle.

His wife had suggested that morning that he get another new handle, for the ax-head was useless without it; and the one Hicks had bought was on exhibition in the drug-store, and probably he would never get it back.

This time he decided that there should be no mistake. He would have the handle sent home. So Hicks went to the hardware-store and ordered the article.

"I hope Mrs. Pierce sees the new handle delivered at my house," he said to himself spitefully. "She'll be sure to tell him."

Feeling that there would be some revenge in this move, Hicks returned to the office and conversed with Spooner over the wire. Detectives had already been hired by both parties, he learned,

and Pete had been placed under a bond to insure his appearance as witness at the trial, if anybody was arrested.

Hicks dragged through the afternoon's work and took a train half an hour later than his usual one, in order to avoid meeting his enemy. The surprise and chagrin were, therefore, mutual when the two men accidentally bumped into each other in the smoker.

Neither admitted the other's presence, and they both slumped into seats as distant from each other as possible.

They walked home fifteen feet apart, and disappeared into their separate dwellings.

"Anything new, Bertha?" Hicks asked his wife.

"No, only I went to a card-party this afternoon, and I overheard several choice bits of sarcasm."

"You have to expect that in being the wife of a public character," Hicks rejoined, swelling up.

"Oh, John, I wish you had never got into this affair. It's awful. People look at me as though I were the wife of a criminal, and their air is so sympathetic."

"Was Mrs. Pierce there?"

"Yes."

"Did you speak to her?" the head of the house demanded with a frown.

"Why, of course not. How could I, after all that has happened? It was very noticeable, but we both had to cut each other in order to keep up appearances."

"That's good. I'm glad you think enough of me to keep up appearances for my sake."

"But, John, it was so hard. You know, Mrs. Pierce and I have been friends for so long, and it seems to be such a small thing for you two to fight over."

"Bertha, you surprise me," cried Hicks.

Dinner was announced at that moment, before Mrs. Hicks had further chance to surprise her husband.

The little Hickses crowded into the dining-room, and their stern parent began serving the meal. He had almost finished the task, when the maid, Sarah, placed a note in front of him.

Hicks tore it open and swiftly absorbed the contents. His face reddened, and the veins in his neck swelled ominously.

"What's this?" he cried in a startled voice.

"Shure, an' I don't know, sor. The little Pierce gurl just fetched it to the back doore."

"That scoundrel, Pierce! Oh, if I had him here!" Hicks forgot himself and pounded the table with a nervous fist.

His wife jumped up quickly and rushed around to his place, leaned over his shoulder, and eagerly read the following inflammatory epistle:

MR. JOHN HICKS, ADDRESSED:

ESTEEMED SIR—Thanks for the ax-handle.

I hardly expected it of you, but I am greatly pleased to find that you have enough sense of right and manliness enough to offer some reparation for your strenuous services in making me lose a good tenant for the summer.

Very sincerely,
RICHARD P. PIERCE.

"Reparation — reparation!" snorted Hicks. "As though I owed *him* any! Gee! I'm glad he lost out on the deal, though, and didn't rent his house for the summer. I'm glad I did tear up his old sidewalk, and I'm glad we didn't have time to put it down. I'm glad all the way through."

He caught himself suddenly and looked around at the staring children, a bit shamefacedly.

Then he burst out excitedly:

"But the ax-handle! What ax-handle can he mean? I've sent him no ax-handle."

He turned on his wife with suspicion in his eye.

"Bertha," demanded Mr. Hicks, "Bertha, did you try to patch up a friendship between us by sending him a new handle?"

"Why, no, John. How foolish, after all that has happened. Besides, it's your affair, not mine."

"Bertha, you surprise me," he cried. "I am your husband, and my quarrel should be your quarrel." He looked around at the gaping children again, and cooled down somewhat. "Who could

have sent it to him? Evidently he has received an ax-handle and thinks I sent it."

He glared at his wife as though she were trying to conceal the explanation from him.

"Why, John, I'm sure I don't know," she declared. "How could I? All I know is that everybody is talking about ax-handles these days, and it's getting to be simply terrible. By the way, did you order another one to-day? Sarah has been complaining that she had nothing to chop kindling with."

"Why, yes—yes! I ordered one sent out. Didn't it come?" cried the excited suburbanite.

"I told you I was at the card-party all afternoon; I'll ask Sarah."

A press of the buzzer brought the dutiful domestic.

"Sarah," said the head of the house sternly, "was a new ax-handle delivered here this afternoon?"

"Shure, an' I don't know, sor. I was a cleanin' of th' attic awl th' blessed afthernoon; an' I wouldn't chase down no two flights of stairs, sor, for a ordinary ax-handle," she replied.

"Possibly the delivery-boy left it at Pierce's," suggested Mrs. Hicks. "They often do leave things there for us when we're out, you know."

"That's just it — just it," decided Hicks. "That scoundrel has stolen my ax-handle. I might have known as much. Of all the bald-faced thieves and infernal rascals—*he* is the worst."

"John—John, the children!" continued his wife.

"I see it all—I see it all," went on Hicks, disregarding the warning. "The handle was left there for us; he came home and saw it; that suggested an opportunity for him to get even with me, and also gain an ax-handle by pretending that I had sent it to him in order to patch up the quarrel. He'll not find John Hicks as easy as that. He did it just for spite. I'll find a way to get even—I'll find a way."

"John—John, the children!" his wife repeated with greater emphasis.

"Bertha, you surprise me," was all that Hicks said, as he drew in his horns a little and glared at the irritating note.

He ate dinner in silence, and when dessert was brought on still sat moodily, contemplating the note from Pierce.

"He won't rent that house if I can help it, Bertha," he announced suddenly in a more subdued tone.

"But, John," she remonstrated, "I don't think such a spiteful spirit sets well on your shoulders."

"It's not spiteful, Bertha; but look at all the trouble he has made for me. Here we decide to exchange work; he helps me bolster up my front porch, and I start to help him chop down his rotten pear-tree, when, quite accidentally, I break his ax-handle. Then follows the chain of events. The election is a tie, somebody trifles with the ballots, and he accuses me—me, of doing the work just because—"

"And you accuse him, John."

"I know, Bertha; but I had reason."

"So did he."

"Bertha, you—"

"Oh, I know I surprise you John; but that is the way it looks to me."

"I should think you would be more careful of the way you talk before the children, Bertha," Hicks remonstrated.

There was silence after that. In a short time the children left the table, and Hicks and his wife sat over their coffee.

"Well, I'm going to find a way to get even with Pierce. I don't think much will come out of this election investigation; I'm going to find some other way. If I could only keep him from renting his house this summer."

"But don't you think that would be rather mean—rather small? You've been friends for so long. Couldn't you let it go at that? I'm sure this thing can be patched up."

Hicks glared his disgust, and said nothing.

A few minutes later he was called to the telephone. It was a business friend who had rung him up from the city on a matter of some importance.

When the business was finished the friend asked:

"By the way, John. I've been thinking of taking a place out in your suburb for the summer. They tell me it's an ideal resort for a city man, and that it isn't hard to get a good furnished house in Oak Forest for three months or so."

"That's right," answered Hicks.

"Why don't you come out? It's a bully place to stay in the hot weather."

"Do you know of any house vacant near you? I'll rent it on the spot."

The thought of Pierce's anxiety to rent sprang instantly to Hicks's mind.

Here was a chance to get even. He wasn't doing it for spite, he argued to himself; but his reply seemed rather that way:

"No, I don't know of any house near me for rent this summer. You'd better try some other suburb."

"But I'm quite crazy about that town of yours," answered the friend. "You're sure there's no place?"

"Absolutely. It would be useless for you to try to find one, I'm sure."

"You'll let me know if you hear of such a place. I've got my heart set on Oak Forest. Call me up if you learn of any place to rent, John; or cinch it for me."

"I'll do that," answered Hicks lightly.

As he turned away from the phone he encountered his wife close beside him. There was a worried look on her face.

"Oh, John, you shouldn't have done that!" she cried. "You know how badly the Pierces want to rent their house."

"Well, I hope they get a tenant," answered John Hicks, with an ugly grin that did not set well on him. "But they won't get one if I can help it."

It is strange how malice will creep into the heart of an even-tempered man.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL FOR REVENGE.

NEXT morning the two foes met on the station platform.

Richard Pierce had an indulgent smile on his face, and he looked toward Hicks without recognition several times. It was perfectly clear that he was gloating over the latest ax-handle incident and felt rather pleased with himself for having written the note to Hicks, thanking him for the new handle.

Hicks, too, wore a strange smile, which Pierce could not fathom. It was merely an expression of his own satisfaction at having been the means of keeping Pierce from renting his house for the summer.

Pierce had planned to take his family away immediately after election — the new election—the date of which had not been decided. It looked now as if he would have to leave his house untenanted, or else stay at home.

Hicks hugged himself all morning for having taken advantage of an opportunity to get even with Pierce. It occurred to him several times that he had acted with rather a mean spirit; but, in the face of what Pierce had done to him, his revenge seemed no more than right to him.

About noon Spooner called him up.

"The detectives seem to be puzzled by this case," he said. "They keep running into snags, but we'll prove yet that the citizens' party hired somebody to tamper with the ballots."

"But if we can't get any evidence?" suggested Hicks.

"Well, the case will have to rest then. Your reputation is good, and so is Pierce's. They couldn't think of arresting either of you. By the way, the date of the election was set this morning."

"When's it going to be?"

"A week from to-day."

"So soon? That doesn't give us much time, does it?"

"No. But we'll get busy electioneering again, and we hope to learn something through the detectives that will make this election ours beyond a doubt."

"I hope we will."

"You'll be our candidate for the reelection, of course?" asked Spooner.

"Oh, yes! You can bank on me. I won't draw out of the fight now. When I took up the standard of the non-partizan party I swore to see things through to a finish—his finish or mine—and I'll stick to it."

"That's the way to talk. That gives me new confidence. You're the kind of candidate to have."

They rang off, and Hicks fell to thinking again of his cleverness in steering a sure tenant away from Pierce.

As he gloated over this achievement, a friend dropped into the office to discuss Oak Forest politics.

"The reelection will be a hot one," said the newcomer.

"It'll be as hot as we can make it," rejoined Hicks.

They argued and speculated concerning the coming election for some time, and, just before leaving, the friend chanced to remark:

"I saw your old friend Pierce this morning."

Hicks pricked up his ears, and yet pretended to be wholly uninterested.

"He says he's having an awful time getting a tenant for the summer; that he's got to go out into the country immediately after the reelection, and he'll probably have to leave the house vacant. He's very much worried about it. You know, we had so many burglaries in vacant houses last summer, and then there's the rent to be considered."

"Why don't he stay at home?" suggested Hicks calmly.

"Well, he's got a little hope. Said a fellow was coming out to look at the house to-morrow afternoon, and he thought he might land him, although he's hard to suit, I guess, and all he likes about Pierce's house is the view."

Hicks jumped from his chair the moment the other had gone. The conversation had given him the glimmering of an idea.

"All he likes is the view, and the view is across my yard," said Hicks, stamping up and down the office in thought, his hands clasped behind his back.

The idea grew and became more luminous.

"By gad!" he cried suddenly. "I'll do it."

He paced the floor for some minutes more; then stopped, pulled at his mustache, and mused:

"Bertha will think it isn't right. She'll say I just did it for spite. Well, that's what I'm going to do it for. I don't care who knows. It's to be for spite. I'll make no bones about admitting it."

With the idea firmly in mind, he rushed to the telephone and called up the local lumber dealer at Oak Forest.

"He won't rent that house all summer, or any summer, if I can help it," muttered Hicks, as he waited impatiently for the connection.

"Hallo—that you, Jones?" he asked when at last a voice replied.

"Yes. What is it?"

Hicks dropped his voice and spoke very distinctly. He talked for two full minutes, then broke off with:

"Got that all right? Remember, it's a rush order. I've got to be sure of it. Get half of the stuff at my house before eight o'clock to-night, or you lose the job."

"I'll do it, but it will rush me."

Hicks turned away from the instrument with a satisfied grin. He picked up the telephone directory a moment later and began searching through it.

"Guess he's the best carpenter in town," mused Hicks as his finger stopped at a familiar name.

He called the number, and was soon in conversation with Oak Forest again.

"I'll be on the job with all my men at one o'clock to-morrow afternoon. That's the earliest minute I can get to it," was the final answer he received.

"Remember, time is important," said Hicks. "Not later than one o'clock, or you lose the order. The lumber will all be there, and everything in readiness."

Hicks was so pleased over this new idea that he could not work that afternoon. He dawdled along and put in his time, but did nothing in particular.

At five o'clock he took the train for home. To his great surprise, Pierce was in the same car, and seemed to be much worried about something.

"Maybe some of the children got the measles, and his wife called him up on the phone to come home early," Hicks thought to himself as he watched the anxious face of his neighbor.

It was not until half an hour later that Hicks understood the worried look and pieced out the story of Pierce's early home-coming.

For, as Hicks hurried up his walk, he saw a lumber wagon just departing, and on the party-line were two loads of fence posts, sixteen feet high, and one load of long stringers. Then he smiled as he realized that Mrs. Pierce must have seen the delivery from her window and called up her husband to come home at once, divining what was in Hicks's mind.

He turned on the top step and caught a glimpse of Pierce looking toward the lumber. Then he glanced up the road and saw another lumber wagon approaching his residence with a load of sixteen-foot fencing.

His wife met him at the door.

"What is it, John?" she cried. "What is all this lumber for? The man said you ordered it, and I had to let him leave it. Explain to me. What's it all about?"

"Why, nothing in particular, Bertha," said Hicks, really considering his action seriously for the first time. "You saw the fence-posts, didn't you?"

"Yes, but what are they for?"

"Bertha, you surprise me! Fence-posts are used exclusively in the building of fences."

"But these are so high."

"Exactly. They will stick sixteen feet out of the ground. That is the kind of fence I am going to build."

"*A spite fence!*" she cried.

"Yes."

There was silence between them for some minutes. Hicks looked around in a manner that was almost guilty. His wife stood staring.

"So it has come to this!" she said finally. "John, what on earth are you building a spite fence for? We will suffer from it as much as the Pierces."

"Not quite so much," Hicks smiled sheepishly. "You see, it will cut off all the view from the Pierces' house, and he will never be able to rent it again."

"John, John"—she was on the verge of tears—"I never thought you would stoop so low in an effort to get even."

"Neither did I," answered John Hicks, stepping to the window to view his lumber-pile.

To his great surprise, he saw Pierce in earnest consultation with the teamster who had just driven up with his load of sixteen-foot fence-boards.

Hicks tried to guess at the conversation between the two, but lip-reading was beyond him.

He exercised his patience by walking up and down the room in characteristic pose, his hands behind his back, for some minutes. Then he saw Pierce leave the driver, after slipping him a bill, and enter his house.

The teamster came to Hicks's door and rang the bell.

"Will you sign for this lumber, Mr. Hicks?" he requested.

Hicks took the receipt and signed it. The teamster turned to go and unload.

"Just a minute!" requested Hicks. "What is it?"

"What were you and Mr. Pierce talking about out there on the lawn? I don't like to appear inquisitive, but—" he slipped half a dollar into the man's hand and the driver smiled, for he had heard the story of the political struggle over the ax-handle.

"I don't mind tellin' you," smiled the teamster. "Mr. Pierce just asked me how our lumber stock was and told me to take an order in to Mr. Jones for the same amount and kind of lumber as you ordered."

"Oh!" said Hicks, shutting the door.

"Bertha! Bertha!" he cried a minute later. "Pierce is going to build a spite fence, too, and he thinks he'll get his up first."

CHAPTER IX.

A RACE FOR A FINISH.

MRS. HICKS rushed to the window.

"John! John! This is awful," she sighed.

"It's going to be exciting," replied Hicks, rolling up one sleeve and striding back and forth as though he sniffed a battle in the air and seemed to like the anticipation of the burning gunpowder.

"But how foolish!" protested Mrs. Hicks.

"It's foolish of Pierce to build a spite fence when mine would do as well; but his pride is a strange thing. I never saw a man so eager to get the best of a fellow being in my life."

"Except yourself," corrected his wife.

"Bertha, you surprise me," her husband growled.

Then he picked up his hat and strolled outdoors. It was already growing dark, and the teamster had just finished unloading.

"Will you be able to get much more of the stuff here to-night?" asked Hicks.

"No. There's just one more load due, and that'll be here 'fore long. We've got over half of it delivered, so you can get a start to-morrow all right."

"That's good," answered Hicks.

The teamster drove away with a peculiar smile on his face, and Hicks fell to pacing the party-line between the two

houses to figure on the best places to sink the posts.

As he walked up and down the dividing-line in the twilight, a silent figure on the other side joined him, and, to Hicks's great discomfort, he found that it was Pierce; and Pierce was also measuring the length of his lot, evidently with a view to building his own spite fence.

Next morning both of the neighbors went to town as usual, but they returned on the one o'clock train. Pierce had four men with him; they were husky, brown fellows in overalls, and each carried a tool kit with a saw sticking out at the end.

Hicks smiled to himself when he saw the carpenters that Pierce had been forced to import from the city.

"Glad I got my order in first," smiled Hicks. "My men are already at work. I guess I'll get my spite fence built ahead of him. Think of his trying to compete with me, anyway."

When he reached home his prophecy was verified. Four stalwart Oak Forest carpenters were just beginning work on his pile of lumber. On Pierce's lawn was a similar pile, and Pierce rushed his men into the field at once.

The holes were dug first, and each group finished at about the same time. Then the posts were sunk, both rows set a few inches from the party-line in order that no law-suit should be incurred.

It is grim business, this building of spite fences. The children of both families, returned from school, wanted to play with the lumber and get in the way; but their stern fathers objected, and the children were forced to remain in the house during the whole exciting time and watch operations furtively through the windows.

By four o'clock the posts were all in place and the stringers temporarily nailed down.

The eight carpenters sawed and pounded, and things were going on well; but the race was neck and neck.

Hicks paced up and down on his side of the posts with a worried air; his hands were sunk deep in his pockets, and he kept glancing at his neighbor's lumber-pile and urging his men on to greater efforts.

Pierce's men battled bravely. Their employer walked energetically up and down the fence, turning on his toes with the swinging motion that sailors use in walking the deck for exercise, and looking for all the world like a restless polar bear in a park cage, the posts representing bars.

It was a race to see which could build his spite fence first, and the thing was in dead earnest. At first both groups of carpenters saw the funny side of the situation, but they were soon sobered down by the looks of their employers. They ceased joking with the workmen opposite, and began to pound and saw in frenzied haste.

The principals stood by all the time, hurrying their men, urging them to greater achievements, and all the time casting sidelong glances at each other.

They appeared like two generals in the field, and it was a fight to the finish. Doubtless both were urged on by anxious eyes peering from behind the curtains of their separate houses, that watched while the long stringers and high boards were being put temporarily in place.

"Why don't you nail in the boards as you go along?" Hicks asked one of the working men when he noticed that each board was put in place and then nails were driven in only a short distance. It was then that Hicks learned a valuable bit of carpentering knowledge.

"It's the general rule," replied the workman. "We sometimes have to change the boards. They don't always come out right, an' we match 'em up different. So we drive in the nails so they'll just hold while we're puttin' up the rest."

"Oh, you go back over the job and nail them in solid afterward?" replied Hicks.

"That's the ticket."

Hicks accepted the explanation, and for a moment turned his attention from the work. To his great surprise, a big crowd had collected in the street, watching the work with gaping mouths.

He had not realized the resultant publicity. It didn't matter, anyway; let them look. He felt spiteful, and so did Pierce. What did the world matter?

The clatter of hammers and boards

brought half the village into the street and the rest to their windows. Such goings-on had never before been seen in the peaceful little burg.

The workers even entered into the vindictive spirit of the game, and an accidental knock occasionally loosened one of the boards on the opposite fence. Working at such close quarters, with two quarreling masters, it was no wonder the men became ugly, and finally spiteful.

And all the while the opposing bosses were standing behind their men like generals; interested each in his own, and seemingly not knowing that such another fortification was being built within a hundred miles.

Such a race was never raced before.

At train-time a score of city workers walked out of their way to view the extravagance of Hicks and Pierce. They called to both of the men, and tried to jolly them, but neither heard; they were too intent on their contest.

Spooner stopped with the rest, but he was not satisfied with viewing the work from the street; he walked up on the lawn, and almost forcibly detained Hicks in conversation.

He made no mention of the fence, but remarked:

"Well, Hicks, I think the detectives have got a clue at last. They've been examining Pete to-day. I think he has some guilty knowledge of the affair. You remember how worried and confused he was when I questioned him at the town hall?"

"Yes," answered Hicks, who had almost forgotten the ballot-box business in his excitement over the erection of the fence.

"Well, the detectives are going to give him the third degree to-night. They're going to keep him awake by taking turns sitting up with him. They think he'll tell the name of the culprit when he gets so worn out that there's no resistance left in him."

"You think he knows, then?"

"The detectives think so, and you remember that he said he heard some breaking glass. I think we'll get something from this source."

"All right. Let me know what you find out," replied Hicks in a preoccupied manner. He broke off then to shout to one of the workmen: "Here! Don't go to sleep on the job. This thing has got to be finished, if we stay up all night. The other party is getting way ahead of us."

The workman sullenly returned to his task, and Spooner faded away quietly, realizing that his candidate had a more important matter on his mind and was not greatly interested in the ax-handle incident at the moment.

Supper-time came, and the carpenters snatched at sandwiches between pounds and spasmodic sawings, and the work went on with as great velocity.

The Oak Forest crowd shifted its interest from the fence to the stomach, and dispersed.

Lanterns were brought, and the work continued.

Very gradually the sky had been clouding up. Hicks and Pierce had both noticed it. The workmen, too, were now becoming aware of an approaching storm.

It was getting late. The men were tired. The jobs were not quite finished.

Suddenly there came a warning thunderclap. Rain burst from the heavens and drenched the carpenters.

Hicks paced about in the downpour, and tried to assure his men that it would soon cease; while Pierce, on the other side of the fence, did the same.

"We'll have to quit, sir," said Hicks's head carpenter suddenly. "The men are beat; it's rainin' too hard to see what we're workin' on. It ain't business ter kill the men, sir."

"Can't you stay till the last board is in?" breathed Hicks excitedly.

"They're most of 'em nailed in temporary now. We'll be back early in the mornin' an' finish."

"But I want it done now. I want this fence finished before the other."

"See!" cried the head carpenter, glancing through an open place in the boarding. "Pierce's men is quittin' now. They ain't no more finished than we are. No, we've got to go; it ain't business ter kill the men, sir."

"But can't you put in the last board? I'll give you three times your pay if you will."

"The men are mad. They've worked

too hard. The boards'll have to be nailed in solid yet. They're just loose now, with a nail or two in each one to hold 'em in place. It'll take too long to finish. See! The men's got their tools packed already; can't get 'em rusty, sir; it ain't business."

The head carpenter ducked his head at the close of the explanation and scooted off through the driving rain after his men, like a duck being chased down a muddy road by an automobile.

Pierce's men had already packed their tools, and were splashing in a dismal procession toward the station.

The storm came on with more ferocity, the wind blew with greater velocity; the lightning flashed, the thunder crashed, until both principals were forced into their houses like two subdued Napoleons who had met their Waterloo.

CHAPTER X.

A CLEAR MORNING.

Both of the drenched neighbors crept, damp and despondent, to reluctant rest.

"A visitation from Heaven! God showing His wrath at the pettiness and futility of the quarrels of two humans." These thoughts both suggested themselves, with different modifications, to the two former friends that night as they shivered and winced on their couches.

A stormy night is a great one for conversion. Many men review their sins by the light of lightning only—bringing close the fear of God.

A thunderclap — of the proper size— will scare some men into realizing even their faults and weaknesses. Both thunder and lightning outdid themselves that night.

One deafening clap, following close upon a flash of lightning as bright as truth, made two neighboring house-owners feel that their respective domiciles had been struck. When the frightful shock had passed and both dimly realized that their houses were still intact, each thought more of the bigness of some things and the littleness of some others. They began to feel that possibly, some time during their lives, they had been guilty of narrowness—meanness even.

Not a jot did the storm abate till early morning. Not a wink of sleep did two guilty house heads get till early morning.

It was a horrid night—full of conscience.

Hicks awakened, after a short, fitful doze in which he had dreamed of a man being spitted in Hades on a huge white-hot hatpin for having failed to render a slight assistance to a friend on earth. The technical charge was for keeping his friend from renting his house so that he could escape the heat of Hades in the summer-time, if Hicks remembered rightly.

There was another vague something in the dream that he could with difficulty recall, as he lay in bed blinking at the dawn. It was something about a punishment meted out to somebody or other who had accused somebody else of maliciously breaking a ballot-box with an ax-handle.

The sun was up now. It was shining brightly. What a fine, clean, clear morning it was. How he wished that he and Pierce were still friendly; they might knock off early that afternoon and play a game of golf, as they did formerly.

Full of conscience, Hicks reeled sleepily to the window and drew back the curtain to look out; an idea possessed him that he detected a like motion in a blind opposite, and he was almost sure that he had caught a glimpse of Pierce's face; that there was something sad in the expression, as though Pierce, too, were tired of it all and ready to give up the fight.

"Bertha! Bertha!" cried Hicks suddenly.

He gasped, shrank back from the window, and clapped a cold hand to his clammy forehead.

His wife rushed to the window and looked out.

There was not a board left on either of the two spite fences. Not a stringer even. The poles stood grimly alone, like totem-poles.

"That awful bolt of lightning last night must have struck the fences," ven-

tured Hicks with a strangely relieved feeling—he was almost glad.

He looked over the lawn. The storm had wrecked it dreadfully; fence-boards and two-by-fours were strewn in confusion over both yards. The sixteen-foot poles alone had withstood the storm, and one of those had been split by the lightning-bolt.

It was a sad sight, and yet, somehow, Hicks rather enjoyed it. To his great relief, his sense of humor seemed to be returning.

He could see things in a different light now; the rain seemed to have washed away a lot of black, gloomy matter that had crept in and clutched his soul. He had known Pierce for a long time. It was a sort of shame that, after such a strong friendship, they should—

"*B-zzzz! B-zzzz!*"

The telephone-bell interrupted his thoughts.

"Who on earth can that be at this hour of the morning?" cried his wife.

"I'll see," answered Hicks, slipping into his bath-robe and slopping along in his bed-slippers toward the phone.

"Hallo!" cried Hicks over the wire.

"Hallo! This is Spooner. *Pete has confessed!*" came the eager response from Hicks's manager.

"Pete has confessed!" repeated Hicks blankly.

"Yes; the detectives gave him the third degree last night, and he told the story."

"Then the other party hired him to tamper with the ballot-box?" queried Hicks in wonder.

"Well, no; not exactly." There was a curious tone in Spooner's voice. "You see, Pete confessed that he really went out for a celebration on election night. He went to town first and bought an ax-handle; he needed a new one for the water-works. Well, Pete had his little party and—"

"Hurry! Hurry!" cried Hicks, impatient to get the news.

"Well, Pete enjoyed himself, and looked a little too much upon the wine when it was red, or the beer when it was yellow, and, consequently, he came home in a precarious condition, with the ax-handle under his arm. The rest of his story is rather vague. He couldn't find the key that let him into the engine-room, so he smashed the first window he came to. It happened to be the one in the board-room."

"I see," cried Hicks, "and the ballot-box was standing on the table close to the window, and the ax-handle went through the glass part of the ballot-box, knocked it off the table, and made it look as though somebody had been trying to tamper with the votes?"

"That's it, exactly. There wasn't any crime at all. Pete didn't own up before because he was afraid of losing his job. He says he can't remember exactly, but he opened the window and climbed through, got to his own room through the door between the board-room and the engine-room, and went to bed. The next thing he remembers is when the crowd outside awakened him in the morning, and then he found that he had left the ax-handle on the floor near the ballot-box when he had smashed the window."

"I see!" cried Hicks.

"Want further details?" asked the other. "They've got his whole story complete, but that's the gist of it."

"What are they going to do with him?" queried Hicks.

"They're going to fire him, and let it go at that. You see, he's just a blundering old drunkard; he didn't do it on purpose, and there's been no attempt to monkey with the ballots."

"Good—fine! See you later," cried Hicks, slamming up the receiver.

He turned to shout the news to his wife; she was at his side, her face beaming.

"I heard it all," said Bertha Hicks. "It was just Pete. That's good; and here you people were accusing each other and everything."

"It was all on account of that ax-handle," cried Hicks. "To think that Pete should happen to break open the window with a new ax-handle. It's too funny!"

He skipped back to his bedroom like a child. There he hurried into his clothes.

His wife stepped in a few moments later to find her husband all dressed but his collar.

"Why, John, you aren't going out without a shave, and without a collar, are you?" she cried. "You look perfectly disreputable."

"Bertha, you surprise me!" he cried. "I'm going just as I am. There's no time to be lost."

She seemed to understand, and there was a glad light in her eyes.

Hicks dashed down-stairs and picked his way across the damaged lawn. Just past the ruined spite fence he met Pierce running toward him.

"I want to—" Hicks caught himself abruptly.

He had had his mind so full of apology since learning of Pete's part in the ax-handle incident that he had not realized how it would seem really to apologize to Pierce.

Pierce stopped at the same moment, and the fire went out of both of their eyes.

Hicks looked around in confusion. They stood only two feet apart, and neither had spoken the words on his mind. Suddenly Hicks noticed that Pierce's dead pear-tree had been blown down by the storm.

A sneaking smile crept into his face in spite of himself. He was really glad to see the pear-tree down.

Looking up suddenly, he caught Pierce's eye.

"I see your blamed tree is down at last," he broke out, from sudden impulse, in a not unfriendly manner.

"Yes," answered the other, rather too eagerly it seemed; "and I notice that the rain has washed the dirt from under the bricks I put under your blamed porch, and it has settled again."

Hicks turned to his porch and gasped in astonishment.

He stood thinking—how was he ever going to fix that thing again without Pierce's help? Somehow, at the thought, he became even more forgiving and conscientious. He hadn't done the right thing to keep the quarrel inflamed.

"I suppose you've heard about Pete's breaking the—"

"Yes," answered Pierce with some hesitation; "I just started over to—"

"Apologize for any doubts or— So did I, Dick!" cried Hicks in a decidedly happy mood.

They reached out and clasped hands.

At that moment Mrs. Hicks called her husband to breakfast.

"Going on the regular train?" asked Hicks, dropping his old friend's hand and turning to the house.

"Yep. I'll meet you."

"All right. So long."

They parted with a feeling of happiness that seemed to them strangely satisfying.

"John, dear," said Hicks's wife at breakfast, "do you think Mrs. Pierce and I can give the party a week from to-day? You know, the card-party we intended having before—"

"Why, of course, Bertha — why not?" queried Hicks in his usual surprised tone.

The neighbors met on the lawn and walked together to the station. They resumed their old friendliness quite naturally as though nothing had happened.

"Say, Dick!" said Hicks suddenly, as they reached the platform.

"Say what?"

"Let's come home early this afternoon and clean up that blooming mess of lumber on our lawns."

"I would—" replied the other slowly, "only—only I've got to look up a tenant for the summer this afternoon. Now that the pear-tree's down, I may stand a chance of renting the place to a good tenant."

Hicks's mind suddenly cast up the case of his friend who wanted a place in Oak Forest; he had thought of it a dozen times through the dismal night before.

"I've got a tenant for you. I'll cinch the thing on the spot. He told me to. Called up just the other day, and wants your place. He'll be all right."

"Good!" ejaculated Pierce. "We'll come home early then and clean up those fool boards."

"Sure," enthused Hicks; "they'll come in handy. We can use them in repairing your sidewalk."

That night a man's form stole out noiselessly from Hicks's house. The form crept on tiptoe across the grass toward the other house.

Bump!

"Darn it!"

The form had struck its nose against a sixteen-foot fence-post.

Recovering from the shock, the form glided on, sneaked up the steps of the house next door, and placed on the door-mat a new ax-handle and a little white note.

The note read:

DEAR DICK:

Here's a handle to replace the one I broke for you.

I forgot to tell you this afternoon that I informed Spooner that I would not run against you in the coming reelection. That leaves the field to you alone.

JOHN HICKS.

THE END.

THE CHUTE THAT BALKED.

By ROY HALSTEAD.

An agonizing ten minutes put in by a bashful lover tottering on the verge of the United States mail.

"PSHAW, I'll not mail it!" and Tom Thorpe threw the letter carelessly down on the table and turned his back on it.

The next instant he stretched out his hand and eagerly picked it up.

"Yes, I will, too!" he exclaimed decisively. "I'll send it to her, and have it over with!"

Opening his door, he stepped firmly out into the hotel corridor and walked briskly up its length to the mail-chute, near the elevators. There he paused, and held the stamped, sealed, and addressed envelope poised over the slot.

And then again he changed his mind. His hand dropped weakly to his side as the disturbing thought entered his mind that the missive, once sent down the slide, would be gone beyond recall, past all possibility of recovery.

"I can't do it," he muttered, half turning from the chute. "It's no use—I haven't got the nerve!"

Six weeks before, Tom Thorpe would not have admitted that he was afraid to do anything upon which he had made up his mind. But a month and a half ago he had not met May Carrol—the only woman he ever had, ever could, and ever would love.

For a month now he had been vainly trying to screw up his courage to the point of confessing to her the loss of his heart. There had been opportunities without number to tell her of his love, since they were almost constantly together—a happy condition of affairs due to the fact that she and her mother were staying in the same apartment hotel, their rooms on the same floor with his.

But he had not yet been brave enough to make his proposal.

And now he had written it in a letter—a letter, ready to be mailed, which he was afraid to send.

But, why need he be afraid? His love was honest; there was no reason for him to be ashamed to ask its return. Why not put the question to the touch—now—and have done with his weak-minded, babyish vacillation?

With a determined closing of his jaws, Tom turned again to the mail-chute, raised the letter to the slot—and dropped it in.

The deed was done. And the instant the note left his fingers he wished he had it back!

The letter was gone. She would get it—by the first mail the next morning, for it was now eleven o'clock, and too late for it to reach her that night—and then what would happen?

Instantly his brain teemed with a hundred possibilities of how the girl would take its contents. She would be angry. She would never let him see her again.

She would laugh at him—worse than all else—for presuming on their short acquaintance by sending her a love-letter.

A love-letter—ugh! His mind revolt-

ed as he recalled the phrases, sentences, and terms of endearment he had used—reread them as they would appear to her eyes — and summed up the note as a whole under the sneering heading—"a sticky mess."

For there was not one chance in a million that she loved him — had had time to learn to care. So she would receive the letter coldly, and all would be over between them.

Why had he sent it to her so soon? Why hadn't he waited, restrained the mad impulse which prompted him to propose before he had known the girl two months?

If only he had the letter back — he would have paid any price, and not thought it too high to recover it.

But that was impossible. Once dropped down the letter-slot, into the mail-box below, the thing was as far beyond his reach as though in another world.

It was one more case of spilled milk, he thought bitterly, over which there was no use crying.

He might as well return to his rooms, and console himself with what slim comfort lay in the contemplation of that millionth chance that she loved him and would take his note in its proper spirit.

His glance turned to the chute behind him for a fleeting, farewell glance at the slide down which his hopes of the future had dashed to destruction. And then a gasp of wonder escaped his wide-spread lips.

For there, before his eyes, not six inches below the mouth of the slot, was a letter, plainly seen, flattened against the glass of the mail-chute!

Fascinatedly, in motionless silence, he stared at the envelope suspended in mid-air.

The postage-stamp on its upper corner, vanishing and reappearing as the lights above cast a flickering glare over the glass, seemed a jovial red eye that winked at him. In the haze that swam before his gaze the white square of envelope danced, the red eye twinkling, and beckoned to him as though to say:

"Come and get me! I knew you'd want me back after you mailed me, so I didn't go down. I stuck in the chute. Come and get me!"

Stealthily, fearful lest some sound or movement might dislodge the precious letter now so temptingly near, he crept toward the chute. Gingerly, and in fear and trembling, he slipped his fingers into the slot.

With dainty care at first, he groped in the narrow chute. Then, in desperation, he twisted, turned, and squeezed his fingers down.

To no avail—his hand fell three inches short of touching the envelope.

His stick-pin! He would fish for it with that.

Hastily detaching it from his cravat, he held it insecurely between the tips of two fingers and lowered it down the chute. The pin barely grazed the letter's end—and that was all.

It was maddening to be so near the note's recovery, and yet so far from its possession. How could he reach it?

There must be something, somewhere, in his rooms that was long enough to shove down the slide, and practicable enough to use in pulling out the letter. He turned up the hall toward his open door—

And then, suddenly, he stopped. A chill tickled its way up his spine at a sound behind him.

It was the opening and closing clang of one of the elevator-doors.

An impulse, stronger than he could resist, twisted his head abruptly around toward the passenger the car had deposited at his floor.

And at once his brow was dewed with an icy perspiration — his knees sagged and rattled together—

For coming toward him, a pleasant smile of recognition on her lips, was Miss Carrol!

"Good evening, Mr. Thorpe!"

Tom gulped and reached absent-mindedly for his hat—checking the foolish gesture at his forehead, where his trembling hand slid wetly along his brow to rumple his hair.

"Good—good evening, Miss Carrol!" he mumbled.

Was ever a situation so terrible? There was that note, sticking, in plain sight through the glass, in the chute where he could not get at it—and here was the very woman to whom it was addressed.

"Out to mail a letter?" asked Miss Carrol, politely making talk out of the fact that he was bareheaded, standing near the letter-drop, and a hundred feet from his open door.

"Oh, no! Not at all!" he hastened to assure her.

If only she would go on to her apartment and leave him! He had to fight to restrain the wild desire to turn and look at the letter behind him in the chute. It seemed that once she saw it she would know instantly all it contained.

"No," he went on, "I—I didn't come out to mail a letter. Just for a breath of air in the hall, you know."

She inclined her head to pass him. Then she stopped.

"Why, there's a letter stuck in the chute!"

Thorpe could feel his face reddening at the excited pumping of his heart.

"Why," he faltered, his eyes intent upon her as she looked toward the slide, "why, so there is! It's odd I didn't notice it before; but there *is* a letter stuck there!"

"I wonder how it happened?" Miss Carrol stepped nearer the chute. Thorpe's eyes were fastened on her in a mesmeric stare of terror as he helplessly watched her approach.

"Of—of course I don't know," he stammered. "I only just noticed it. How is your mother this evening, Miss Carrol?"

"My mother?" She looked at him. "Quite well—as she was when you saw her before dinner."

"To be sure! I forgot that I *did* see her this evening. Isn't this she coming up in the elevator behind you now?"

If only she would stand away from the mail-chute—her dangerous nearness to the letter was gradually straining his nerves beyond all endurance.

"Why, perhaps she is coming up," indifferently, "though she told me she would stay down-stairs with Mrs. Carter and Miss Swift until I returned to them."

She lowered her eyes to the white square of envelope again. Then, flashing a smile at him over her shoulder:

"Feminine curiosity, you know."

And the next instant, too quickly for him to stop her even had he been able, she stooped and read the address.

"Why," she cried, "it's for me!"

He faced her, with only one thought in his mind—thank Heaven she did not know his handwriting!

"For you? Why, how queer, isn't it?" Then hurried lightly on. "Too bad you can't get it out, I'm sure."

"Oh, but I'm going to try, though!" Rapidly she began stripping off her glove. "Since the letter's for me, I'll get it now and not wait for it to be delivered."

"But—really"—he stepped toward her anxiously—"honestly, you mustn't try to get it out!"

"Why not?" She faced him curiously. "Goodness gracious, Mr. Thorpe, one would think from the serious expression of your face, and the way you talk, that you had written the letter yourself—were afraid, for some reason, to have me read it."

"Oh, no!" He hurriedly summoned a smile to replace the too evident worriment in his countenance. "Of course, it's not from me. But I didn't want you to try to get it out, because your hand won't go far enough down. Mine wouldn't when I tried it."

She started.

"When you tried to get this letter out?" she asked wonderingly. "Why—when it was addressed to me—should you try to get it?"

Now he had put his foot in it through idiotically telling her where his hand had been.

"Oh," he quickly answered, groping for some explanation, "I don't mean that I put my hand down the chute to get your letter. Why, as you say, should I wish to do that when the letter is addressed to you?

"You misunderstand me," an inspiration coming to him. "I meant that I put my hand down the slot one day last week when a letter I mailed then was caught as this one is. I found then that my fingers would not reach it. That is why I told you yours wouldn't, either."

He paused and drew breath—thankfully. That was a sharp corner rounded safely, if mendaciously.

"But my hand is smaller than yours." Miss Carrol held it out for inspection. "Perhaps I shall have better luck than you."

With beating heart, he watched her as she inserted her fingers in the chute.

Its excited pounding changed, however, from the throbbing of fear to the bounding of hope, as he saw that her hand, too, fell short.

"You were right about my fingers not reaching," the girl turned to tell him. "But my hairpin ought to do the trick."

Her hairpin! He had not thought that she would naturally use that convenience with which lovely woman solves so many seeming difficulties.

He watched her take one of her coiffure-fasteners from her hair. All the sensations of a criminal doomed to die, looking on at the preparations for his execution, were his as his terrorized gaze followed the swift motions with which she bent the bit of wire straight.

With that she would get out the letter. She would read it—there before him.

Embarrassed as he should ordinarily have been at her discovery of the impassioned words he had written, he realized now that her perusal of the note would mean a worse ordeal for him than the mere undergoing of her scornful arraignment at his boldness.

He had lied to her. Pointblank—not once, but twice or more—he had denied that the letter was from him, that he knew anything of it.

All hope of her ever loving him after this exposure of his deceit was gone. She would hate and despise him in a minute now — and he could never "square" himself.

Yet, realizing all this as certain to happen in the next few seconds, he could not go away—he must stay, rooted with fear to the tiles of the hotel corridor, wait and see it out. The horror of the situation fascinated him.

Carefully she lowered the wire down the chute. His heart rose in his mouth as he saw that it reached the letter—then sank with a shock of relief as all her efforts to pull out the envelope failed.

Now, he thought as she drew forth the hairpin, if only something would happen —a fire break out, or something—before she had time to think of anything else.

"I'll just bend a hook in the end of this," Miss Carrol said calmly, turning her back to the mail-chute to face him. "Then it will be easy to fish it out."

He ran his tongue out on his dry lips and struggled to say something — anything, it mattered not what — to delay her, if only for a moment.

But nothing came. His mind was a blank space, wiped clean of all connected thought.

Only one thing was left for him to do —tell her the truth—now before she discovered his lie for herself, and thus throw himself on her mercy.

"Miss Carrol—" he began.

She did not hear his whispered ejaculation. With the bent wire in her hand, she again turned to the mail-chute.

And then a startled gasp escaped her. At the sudden sound, his eyes followed her gaze to the chute, and he, too, gasped.

The letter was gone! Vanished, as though into thin air. But how?

"Isn't that provoking?" Miss Carrol exclaimed. "Just as I had my letter almost in my hands, somebody up-stairs drops one down and carries mine off, out of sight and reach!"

To be sure, that was what had happened! The girl's quick brain, untroubled, as was his, had grasped the situation immediately.

And now his brain, released by blind luck from its oppression, realized what this stroke of good fortune meant to him.

With the letter gone down the drop into the mail-box below, she couldn't get it till morning—hairpins or no hairpins!

And he would not be at hand when she read it.

But was that cause for congratulation? Was the delay, after all, something to be wished for?

No! By George, he wanted her to know *now* that he loved her! He'd been fooling around long enough, he told himself excitedly, with his hopes and fears of whether she cared for him.

If it hadn't been for that idiot up-stairs, he would know *now* whether there was a chance.

"But, now, you won't know till tomorrow morning," he finished aloud unconsciously.

"No, Jennie's news will have to keep till then," the girl answered indifferently.

The minute the words left his lips he could have bitten out his tongue for its carelessness in letting slip the secret—or

had he quite done that? What was she saying?

"Her letter will certainly keep till morning. Jennie Chalmers's letters always bore me."

Jennie Chalmers! What had a letter from her to do with this?

"You see," Miss Carrol explained, "that letter in the chute was from Jennie—I recognized her handwriting."

Was he mad? Tom wondered dazedly. She must be mistaken. Not knowing his handwriting—which might resemble that of her friend's, for all he knew—she had naturally fallen into this error.

He would make sure of it—going carefully, though, for he was on dangerous ground where a stumble in his words meant exposing everything to her.

"You are sure the letter was from—from Miss Chalmers?" he asked.

"I know it was," she replied. "For, besides recognizing her writing, the letter was addressed to me at Spraycliff, where mother and I expect to go to-morrow morning. I told Jennie the last time I saw her, in the hotel this morning, that we were leaving to-day, as we intended doing. So she addressed me there, thinking her letter would arrive after we did. No one else knew we were going."

She said the letter in the chute was addressed to Spraycliff — and she had looked closely at the envelope, as he had not.

His letter was addressed to her at the hotel—he had sent it through the mail, not wishing the note delivered from him by any one in the house who would gossip, perhaps, over the fact of their correspondence.

Could it possibly be that his letter had not stuck, but gone straight down the slide? He had turned his back on the chute after mailing his envelope—when he looked again a letter was there.

But hadn't he jumped too quickly at conclusions in thinking it his? Just as the letter in question had been sent down the chute by one posted from the floors above, perhaps this might have come from the same direction and lodged by chance before him.

"You said that Miss Chalmers was stopping on what floor of the hotel?" he asked cautiously.

"The one above us," was the answer.

"I suppose, too, that her letter stuck in the slide because it was a little too thick to go down smoothly. Jennie always writes such perfect volumes when she corresponds with me."

He was right, then. He had mistaken another letter stuck in the chute for his, because he saw it where he expected his would be, if by any chance it had been caught.

His letter—his love-letter—had lain down-stairs in the mail-box all the time his nerves had been undergoing the tremendous strain of fearing that she would read it before him.

And he had not lied to her when he said the letter in the chute was not from him. It wasn't.

She would get his letter the next morning, it is true. But she would not know at exactly what time he had come from his room to mail it.

There was that disturbing thought again that she would not get his proposal, after all, till the next day. And he wanted her to know that he loved her now—at once.

So he told her.

Standing there in the hall, unconventionally but without thought of his surroundings, or of the timidity which had kept him silent all those long weeks, he poured out the whole story of his adoration.

"But—but this is so unexpected!" she gasped when he had finished and paused, breathless, before her. "It is so—so seemingly unpremeditated and—and apparently on the spur of the moment, to speak plainly—"

"But it's *not* unpremeditated," he interrupted. "It's been going on in my heart for a long time.

"And if you don't believe it," he added, "look in your mail to-morrow morning. You'll find that I'd already told you this before I saw you to-night."

A moment she faced him.

Then, passing swiftly before him, she threw over her shoulder as she moved up the hall toward her rooms:

"I'll read it to-morrow morning on my way to Spraycliff. You can come there for your answer, if you like.

"And," with her hand on her door-knob, she faced him squarely, "come ready to stay the summer—Tom!"

HIS TEMPTATION.

By W. BERT FOSTER,

Author of "A Path of Peril," "The One Who Was Guilty," etc.

How the thousandth chance offered itself to a brakeman just at a time when he most needed an upward jolt in his fortunes, and what came of his flirting with evil.

CHAPTER I.

ONE CHANCE IN A THOUSAND.

AND now, dear boy, I come to our chance—our only present chance, I mean. You must not blame Uncle Alger too harshly. He is "set" in his opinions, I know; but he has a right to expect me to be dutiful. For sixteen years I have been his care. He thinks he is kind to me now when he refuses to give me to *you,* dear boy, until you are better established.

No man, so Uncle Alger says, is settled and has a surety until he has something besides a mere salary to depend upon. Sickness, or some other cause, may cut off that salary any day. Until you have a thousand dollars to invest in some paying business—his own, if you like—we must wait to be wed. I must be the most ungrateful girl under the dome of heaven if I refuse to be guided by Uncle Alger, after all he has done for me. I am legally under his guardianship.

It means waiting but two years, anyway, dear boy, and I suppose we *are* young to marry. Uncle Alger thinks if he keeps us apart until I am legally of age, you will surely have a thousand dollars saved. I know he means well by us. If he disliked you, Alfred, he would not offer to make you even a small partner in his business You see that, do you not? Be patient, dear boy. Let us wait cheerfully.

"All ready, Deck?" Conductor Harry Connors sang out, as he passed the rear platform where his flagman stood by the step, immersed in what he was reading and quite unconscious of the bustle about him.

"All right, Harry," was the prompt reply. Alfred Dexter hastily folded the letter and slipped it into his pocket.

The afternoon limited from Selsburg to Freedom Junction, on the southern branch of the F., L. and C. Railroad was on the point of departure. Her conductor, Harry Connors, was one of the most popular on the entire system, and he had a sharp oversight of his crew. He expected them to keep their uniforms speckless, to wear fresh linen, to keep their buttons and shoes polished—in fact, to take as much pains with their toilet as though they worked in a bank.

The train was vestibuled, and was made up of a mail and two baggage-cars, two parlor-cars, and three or four day coaches, according to the traffic. Conductor Connors never failed to walk down the line, from the rear of the train to his own station at the front step of the first parlor-coach, a minute or two before the gong clanged for the limited's departure. On the way he scrutinized each brakeman carefully. The man whose dress was not in order was likely to hear about it later from the usually jovial Harry, and in no uncertain terms.

But although Dexter stood at the proper attitude of "attention" beside the step of his car, his mind was still far away from the busy scene. He had fallen in love with Marjorie Alger the first time he had ever spoken with her. Dexter's aunt and uncle had lived in her town, and Deck had seen a strikingly pretty girl on the street and in the small shops several times before he accomplished her acquaintance. He had learned her name, and that she was the daughter, or ward, of Jeremiah Alger, a real-estate broker in the burg. Although his own relatives moved away from Hambleton, Dexter continued to visit there until he found means of being introduced to Marjorie Alger.

When he once knew her he was, as he mentally expressed it, "done for." He had never seen a girl before to whom he

was ready to capitulate unconditionally. His wooing was speedy, and after only these few months Marjorie had promised to marry him—some time.

This uncertainty was galling to the young railroad man. He knew plenty of fellows in his own line of business who were married, and even supported increasing families, on their wages.

The need of "saving" had never impressed itself upon Alfred Dexter's mind heretofore, because he had been alone in the world and had nobody dependent upon him. That condition is likely to make a fellow somewhat selfish and thoughtless about the future.

A little cottage on the outskirts of the Junction—or even in Hambleton—would serve them to begin housekeeping in, and it was easy enough for a salaried man to furnish such a nest by the "easy-payment" method. Dexter "laid over" at Freedom Junction until the morning, when Harry Connors's crew took the eight-fifteen accommodation back to Selsburg. His hours were as regular as though he worked in an office, his money was sure, and he felt perfectly confident that he could take care of Marjorie.

But there was a hitch when the proposed marriage came to the ears of the girl's guardian. This letter, which Dexter had read several times already, was a final dash to his hopes.

Two years seemed a mighty long wait to the enamored young man; and then the condition Uncle Alger had put before them was a somewhat startling one.

"Our only chance," he muttered. "Why, it isn't a chance in a thousand! If I saved so much money in two years, I'd have to bank about half my salary right along. Huh! Uncle Alger certainly has it in for me. Marj can think as she likes, but he *doesn't* feel kindly toward me, or he wouldn't have raised such a condition.

"Hang him, I'd like to fool him! I'd like to walk into his office and plank down the money and take him at his word. I *bet* he'd be somewhat surprised. And, gee, I'd be surprised myself if I could do it!" he finished ruefully.

The gong in the roof of the train-shed clanged. Connors, watch in hand, had his foot on the step of the forward car. The engineer craned his head out of the caboose-window, his hand on the lever. It was the moment of starting.

Suddenly there was a slight disturbance at the gate, a man broke through and ran along the platform as the wheels of the train began to turn. Dexter, as well as the other members of the crew, had leaped aboard.

Some of the station employees tried to stop the belated passenger; but he flung them off, sprinted for the final few yards, and seized the railing of the last car.

To avoid an accident, the flagman stooped and gripped the unwise man. He was a fleshy fellow, dripping with perspiration, and he seemed almost at his last gasp when Dexter dragged him aboard.

"That's a foolish thing to do," declared the trainman as he steadied the passenger on the platform while the train swung out of the shed and clattered over the switches in the yard.

"It is, hey?" panted the man. "Let me tell you *I'm* a hard man to beat. I never lost a train yet, and I'm not going to begin now."

He had a round, smoothly shaven face, his neck was fat and wrinkled over his collar, and his head was as bald and shiny as a peeled potato. His hair had been sandy in his youth, and was now mixed with gray, so that it looked very light indeed. He had small, bright eyes, which were not unpleasant in their expression; but his mouth made a rather grim line when he was not speaking.

He walked unsteadily into the car and sought a seat toward its forward end. To Dexter's mind he was altogether too full-blooded a man to risk such exertion on a hot day; where he sat the top of his bald head—he had taken his hat off—showed as red as flame.

But the young man had little leisure just then to ruminate upon the fat man. The train's first stop was but ten miles out, and it would have been impossible for Harry Connors to punch all the tickets alone.

His flagman was furnished with a punch, and always worked forward from the rear end, meeting the conductor somewhere in the third day-coach, and before the train slowed down at the first station.

In fact, Dexter had entire charge of the rear of the train until it was well on its way to the Junction, for the stops were rather frequent at first. He was already collecting tickets and punching seat-checks before the train was clear of the yard.

He came to the fat man and found, as he suspected, that he had no ticket.

"But I didn't miss the train—I didn't miss it!" he repeated over and over again as he began fumbling in his pockets, presumably for money with which to pay his fare.

"Where are you going?" demanded Dexter.

"Going?" The man looked blank for a moment; then he slapped his moist forehead and laughed thickly. "Going? Why—I didn't miss the train, did I?"

"Come!" ejaculated the flagman, nudging him. "My time is limited. You must pay your fare."

"How—how much is it?" stammered the fat man, still searching his pockets as though his own clothing was unfamiliar to him.

At least, he did not seem to know where he carried his money. He was prosperous looking, wore a heavy gold chain across his vest, and a diamond sparkled on his fat finger. Dexter did not presume that he was a train-beat, but there was something very peculiar in his manner and actions.

"Tell me where you want to go," said the young trainman distinctly. "Then I will tell you the tariff."

"To—to Hambleton," stammered the fat man at last.

Yet he said it in so strange a way that Dexter was still puzzled. He told him quickly the cost.

The man still fumbled in his pockets.

"I—I'll pay you when you come back," he muttered.

"You'll pay me right now," returned Dexter bruskly. "And I haven't any time to fool away, either."

The fat man scowled at him; but just then he extricated one hand from the depths of his trousers-pocket, and with it came a roll of bank-bills, the sight of which made the young man gasp.

"Why, that bunch would choke a dog!" was the unspoken comment of the railroad man.

The stranger peeled off the outside bill and thrust it into Dexter's hand.

"There, take it out of that," he growled.

The young man saw that it was a note of large denomination; but he gave it a single glance only as he thrust it into his pocket.

"All right," he said, hurrying on; "I'll give you the change later."

He had already punched a check and thrust it into the back of the seat in front of the fat man. But the latter rose up and would have followed him.

"Here," he exclaimed, "gimme my change!"

"When I come back. I can't stop now," said Dexter, already at the door of the car.

Had the bill been for five or ten dollars, Dexter could have changed it himself; but he would have taken it with him, just the same, for a leisurely examination. That was a rule that Connors had taught him. And *this* was a big bill, and Connors must have a chance to examine it closely himself before breaking it for the passenger who tendered it.

The incident had delayed Dexter, and he slammed the car-door and went on, meeting Connors just as the conductor finished the third day-coach.

"What kept you, Deck?" was the conductor's query.

The train was then slowing down for the first stop.

"A fellow without a ticket. And he flashed a big one on me," returned Dexter, producing the crumpled bill and tendering it.

"Humph! What is it?"

"A century," said Dexter. "Better give it a look—although he had a bunch of money that certainly looked good to the naked eye," and the flagman laughed.

"*What did you say this was?*" repeated Connors, with a sudden emphasis that drew his subordinate's immediate attention.

"A hundred-dollar bill, I thought—isn't it?"

"A hundred fiddlesticks!" snapped the conductor. "I can't change this, whether it's good or bad. What does he think we are—a bank?"

He thrust the note under Dexter's

nose. The eyes of the young man popped open with amazement, for the bill was for a thousand dollars!

CHAPTER II.

THE QUEEREST CASE ON RECORD.

"AND he had a bunch of it, big enough—"

Dexter murmured these words without really knowing what he said. Connors interrupted him with a laugh.

"He must have had," he said, "if he could hand one like that out so easy. Tell him to 'come again'—to dig up something smaller."

"It can't be good!" exclaimed the flagman, with sudden decision.

Connors had been examining the thousand-dollar note from every point of view.

"If—it—ain't—good—I'll eat it!" he grunted. "I never saw a good bank-note, then. No, no, Deck—the man's made a mistake. Was he sober?"

"He was. But he came near missing the train, and he must have done this in his confusion, of course. No man would hand out such a note—"

"Where did he say he was going?" demanded Connors hastily.

"Hambleton."

"Then there's time enough. I'll show the bill to Dwyer. *He* knows something about currency. I'll be back in a minute. If it should be a counterfeit flashed on us, we ought to do something about it."

The conductor hurried forward, and soon after the train started again he reappeared. The express messenger, Bill Dwyer, said the note was good; and the baggage-master, Tim Sullivan, agreed.

"You take it back to the man, Deck," said the conductor. "Like enough he's found out what he's done by this time, and he'll be cutting up didoes. Who wouldn't—with a thousand-dollar bill on the loose?"

Dexter tucked the note deep down in his trousers-pocket, and he was a little pale. That *was* a big note to have the care of. A thousand dollars — the very sum he had been thinking of since reading Marjorie Alger's letter. Was there ever such a queer coincidence?

"Well, it's lucky that some people have as much as a thousand in cash," Dexter murmured as he went back through the cars, collecting the tickets of those passengers who had boarded the train at the last station.

He came to the rear coach. There was the fleshy man in the forward seat where he had left him.

"I reckon he wouldn't be likely to run away," thought the young man grimly.

Yet there was a change in the fat man, and Dexter noticed it almost at once. He was quite pale, his head rested weakly on the back of the seat, and his eyes were closed. His scant light hair was plastered to the back and sides of his head, evidently having been wet; there was water splashed on the floor, and some sprinkled on the man's clothing. The ice-water tank was directly in front of him, and it looked as though the passenger had thrown some of the fluid over his head and face.

The man's little eyes opened languidly when Dexter entered the car, and the door banged. Those eyes were not sharp and suspicious now; there seemed to be a film over them, and he scarcely appeared to realize who Dexter was when the young man stopped before him.

There were no other passengers very close to the fat man. There had been when the train started from Selsburg, but his near neighbors had left the car at the first stop.

The little eyes stared up at Dexter wonderingly at first, and then the man began to fumble in his pockets as he had before.

"Conductor," he muttered in an impersonally questioning way, "didn't I give ticket? *Must* have give ticket—"

He spoke thickly — exactly like one who has imbibed more stimulant than is wise. Dexter was puzzled.

"You gave me a bill to change," said the flagman, drawing the bank-note slowly from his pocket.

The eyes grew sharper, and the man stopped mumbling. His mouth was a tight, suspicious line again, and he waited for the railroad man to proceed.

"Here it is," said the latter. "I didn't notice its denomination when you handed it to me. We can't change that.

You must have something smaller. The fare to Hambleton is only—"

He told him the tariff, tendering the thousand-dollar bill meantime. The fat man still sat well back in the corner of the seat, his hands on his knees, his little eyes beginning to sparkle. And he never said a word, nor did he offer to accept the bank-note.

But a faint color came back into his cheeks; indeed, Dexter saw it mounting from the fat wrinkle of his neck that lapped his wilted collar, clear to the perfectly bald crown of his head.

"You must have a smaller bill, sir," repeated Dexter, watching the other curiously.

"What's this?" grunted the man, eying the bank-note suspiciously.

"Don't you remember?" demanded the astonished flagman. "You gave me—"

"I did not," declared the other, interrupting, and speaking not only confidently, but defiantly. "I gave you my ticket before. You're mistaken. You've got the wrong man."

Dexter heard the words, but for fully half a minute they did not penetrate to his understanding. It was ridiculous—preposterous—that the man should deny his own identity; but to refuse the thousand-dollar bill was utterly beyond Dexter's understanding.

"Why, sir—"

"I did not give it to you; you've got the wrong man," repeated the other, staring straight into the brakeman's face, as though challenging him to deny the fantastic statement.

"But—but—"

"I'm not going to Hambleton," continued the man doggedly. "I gave up my ticket for Packard—the next station. And I'm going to get out there."

He said it decisively, and began to get out of his seat—moving heavily and evidently feeling some uncertainty in his legs. The train was reducing speed again, drawing in to the Packard station.

Dexter was speechless, and almost helpless. Instead of being able to think clearly and reach any explanation of this remarkable emergency, his brain merely *buzzed*. He stared at the fat man with sagging jaw, while the fat man scowled at him.

"I gave you my ticket," muttered the passenger, yanking open the door.

The train stopped. The fat man stumbled down the steps, and leaped upon the platform with a jar and a grunt. He went off from the station at once without a glance behind him. And he left Alfred Dexter with the thousand-dollar bill in his hand.

Tully Long, the brakeman, waved his hand and sprang upon the steps as the train moved on again. Dexter saw him coming, and instinctively thrust the bank-note into his pocket.

He turned back into the rear coach with that same paralyzed feeling in his mind. He could not think connectedly. The situation was not *real*.

Had he awakened just here and fallen out of bed, Dexter would have been not at all surprised.

As for his having made a mistake in the man who had given him the thousand-dollar note, *that* was utterly impossible. He glanced over the car. There was not a passenger who, by any possibility, could be mistaken for the stranger who had just left the train.

An old gentleman who sat well forward beckoned the flagman, and Dexter went to him.

"Did he try to beat you?" asked the passenger curiously. "He didn't give you a ticket, did he? Something funny about him, wasn't there?"

"He certainly was a very peculiarly acting man," admitted Dexter, his voice trembling.

"Maybe he was sick," said the curious old gentleman. "That other fellow got him some water and bathed his head. Heat overcame him, maybe—eh?"

Dexter caght at one point of the old gentleman's remarks.

"Who was the man who aided him? Where is he?" he asked.

"Oh, he left the train back at the first station. Didn't you notice him? A little, thin, shabby man—kind of rat-eyed. He fussed over the fat fellow and brought him the water. That was just before the train stopped. He seemed in a hurry to leave the moment the cars slowed down."

Dexter saw, from the way his informant talked, that *he* knew nothing about the thousand-dollar bill. Nobody else

sat near enough to see the fat man refuse to accept the note.

The situation was so inexplicable that the young fellow could scarcely answer the voluble old gentleman courteously. He hurried to the rear of the car where he could be alone.

It is not true that Alfred Dexter was tempted at this point to convert the thousand-dollar bank-note to his own use. He was too greatly puzzled and confused to contemplate *that* phase of the situation.

He had surely made no mistake in the identity of the man who had given him the note. The fellow had flatly denied being its owner. Now, some very strong reason must be found for such a denial.

Philanthropists are not riding about the country handing out big bank-notes to needy and — more or less — deserving young men. Dexter was practical enough; his imagination would never run away with his common sense. But so mysterious was the occurrence that at first no practical explanation offered itself to his mind.

It couldn't be a joke that some of his mates had put up on him. He drew out the bank-note and examined it as carefully as had the conductor.

If he knew anything about it at all, the bill was good. At least, if it was a counterfeit, it was a high-class one; and where would the boys get such a work of art? *That* idea he put aside as without the least foundation.

Nor was it a trick to try his honesty. Who would care to do that? And to risk a thousand-dollar bill in the transaction?

These and similar thoughts Dexter brushed away instantly. He admitted that the bank-note might be a counterfeit, though a most excellent one. But, if so, the fat man had not been in a joking mood when he handed it to him.

It is a serious matter to try to pass false money, and in that very fact was the first reasonable explanation which knocked at the door of Dexter's mind.

In his haste and confusion the fat man might have passed him a bad note without meaning to do so. That whole roll of bills Dexter had seen in his possession might have been counterfeit money.

After the flagman had gone on, the passenger discovered what he had done, and feared disclosure—accusation—perhaps arrest. That was why he had refused to accept the bank-note when the young man tried to return it to him.

This explanation possessed some savor of reasonableness. And yet it did not fully satisfy Dexter by any manner of means.

His eye was keen, and he could see nothing out of the way on the face or the back of the thousand-dollar note. Naturally, he was not used to handling bills of such large denomination; but Harry Connors had been confident that the note was good, and so had the express messenger and the baggageman. The three were better qualified to judge than was the flagman, and they had pronounced the note O. K.

Accepting its genuineness, then, this first reasonable explanation must be cast aside. If the money was good, for what cause would a man deny the ownership of it?

Dexter mentally reviewed every word the fat fellow had said to him when he had first demanded his ticket, and how he had acted. Dexter remembered that the passenger had seemed annoyed at his insistence in collecting the fare immediately.

He had pulled the big roll of bills from his pocket, and, without a glance at them, had peeled off the outside note and thrust it into Dexter's hand. The young man recalled that most clearly. His giving the trainman the thousand-dollar bill might easily have been a mistake.

But, then, to explain his reason for refusing the bill when it was brought back to him? Thousand-dollar bills are not usually carried by ordinary business men—especially as the "wrapper" for a bank roll.

Many business houses and most banks file the numbers of notes of such large denomination that come into their possession. A thousand-dollar bill can in most cases always be correctly traced if stolen.

Ah, that was the key to the puzzling circumstance! Dexter's mind finally grasped it, and so reasonable did the explanation appear that he discarded every other answer to the puzzle.

The huge roll of money the fat man carried had not been honestly come by. Indeed, his having inadvertently handed out the thousand-dollar bill to pay his fare on the train was a point to prove this statement. He was not familiar enough with the money in his own pocket to realize the denomination of the bill he was giving Dexter.

And when he *did* discover his error, no wonder he had been taken faint, as the old gentleman said. The mistake might have spelled apprehension and jail for the fat man, if he had really stolen that thousand-dollar bill.

And all he could do when Dexter came back with it was to deny any knowledge of the money, and even his own identity into the bargain!

The fat man's curious behavior carried out this idea fully. In his fright and confusion he had made his denial; and then, at the first opportunity, left the train.

No knowing how he had come by all that money. He might be one of a gang of bank-robbers, escaping with his share of the spoils. Or he might have "turned the trick" back at Selsburg just before the train started. That would explain his haste and determination to catch this particular train.

The fat man might be trailed by detectives. A telegram might overtake the train before it reached the junction, demanding the arrest of the escaping thief. And Dexter had let him get off the train without a word!

That was not the point, however. He could not be held accountable for the escape of the fat man. And nobody could identify the man who had given him the thousand-dollar bill but himself. Even Connors did not know.

The conductor supposed that the bill had been presented for a fare by mistake, and that he, Dexter, would straighten out the error at once. Such a situation as this—the denial of his identity and the refusal of the man to take back the bank-note — would never be born in Harry Connors's mind.

It was plain that no other passenger had seen the thousand-dollar note passed to Dexter. The matter was between himself and the fat man. And the fat man was possibly a thief and had no right to the money. Then, *whose was the note?*

And it was right here, not previously, that the temptation first assailed him.

CHAPTER III.

THE HORROR OF IT.

DEXTER had been out in the world, and his own master, for ten years. He was twenty-three, and had escaped many of the snares that usually entangle footloose young men of his age. Being left an orphan so young, and obliged to do something toward his own support, had made a man of him while he was still practically a boy.

Immorality and indecencies never cast any glamour over his mind. He continued to view vice as the monster of horrid mien, because he had refused to become familiar with it. Not that he was anything on the order of the mollycoddle. He was only a clean-minded, and had been a pretty clean-lived, young man up to this point in his career.

Temptation comes to us from without, not from within. The old doctrine of original sin is all right, as far as it goes; but a man who has lived honestly, and who has eschewed evil for twenty-three years does not suddenly become rotten at heart because he contemplates crime. That thought assails him from without; it is not born of his own volition.

Had one X-rayed Dexter's soul an hour before the stranger put the thousand-dollar bill into the young railroad man's hand, there would have been found no germ of dishonesty coiled up there ready to burst into life at the first chance he might have to convert to his own use some other person's property. He was as free from any such mean intentions as any man who ever lived.

He had always been honest. He had never contemplated any other life for himself but one of rectitude.

But circumstances were ripe, when this bank-note seemed to be thrust on him by fate, to open the door for temptation. A thousand dollars was exactly the sum he needed to bring about the fruition of the strongest desire of his nature. Two years to wait until Marjorie Alger was free to marry, looked a long desert of

time. And even *then* he would be expected to show at least a thousand dollars saved if they were to have Uncle Alger's blessing.

Dexter had never chanced to meet Marjorie's uncle, but he very well knew that he shouldn't like him, and he was confident that Mr. Jeremiah Alger had taken a strong dislike to him.

First of all, to whom did the thousand-dollar note really belong? Dexter could no more answer that than he could fly. He was very well assured that it did *not* rightfully belong to the fat man who had given it to him.

Dexter was really the receiver of stolen funds—the innocent receiver. At least, he was innocent up to this point.

He did not have to ruminate an instant over the right course to pursue. He knew it instinctively. He should report the strange matter to Harry Connors, and turn the thousand dollars in to the office.

The railroad company would make some attempt to find the real owner of the money. If the person did not appear, Dexter, who had the best right to it, would in time get the thousand dollars, with the bank interest that would accrue meanwhile.

But this happy conclusion would be years hence. A thousand dollars was not a sum to give up carelessly. The corporation might be held responsible by the real owner, and it must hold the thousand dollars long enough to preclude any suit for damages that might arise out of the incident.

Had it been some article—no matter how valuable—that Dexter had found in his car, he would, in all probability, have turned it over to the lost-and-found bureau in the regular order of the day's business. But this thing was out of the ordinary. His mind had been full of his desire to achieve a thousand dollars and bear Marjorie Alger away from her ogre of an uncle. *And here was the thousand dollars!*

He saw Connors coming through the train to him, and he tried to smooth the emotion from his face and get a grip on his nerves before the conductor should get near him. With no further thought than that, he took the first step on the path of deceit. And, having taken it, he seemed to be instantly shown the best and "safest" course to pursue regarding the mysterious bank-note.

It would not do to ignore the thing. Connors would some time remember it, and it would be best to have its discussion over with now. Nor did Dexter contemplate any elaborate line of deceit. He had just one plain, unvarnished lie to tell—and then stick to it.

He would not try to mislead Connors by making a mystery of the fat man. He could safely give a clear and exact description of the stranger. He would even suggest his own secret suspicions regarding the dishonesty of the fellow, and he could repeat what the old gentleman had said about the fat man fainting and being brought to by another passenger during Dexter's trip forward.

Then he could repeat the story of the man's leaving the train at Packard, and even admit that no fare had been collected for his ride from Selsburg. All these things were perfectly true, and would be safe to tell.

The one thing Dexter had to keep to himself was regarding the man's strange denial of his identity and his refusal to accept the thousand-dollar bill.

This program the young flagman followed out without a tremor. It was a story curious enough to excite Connors's interest and wonder, at that. But it sounded much more reasonable than the truth—at least, on that final point.

"He was nothing but a bluffer, then?" commented the conductor. "He took a risk. Served him right if we had held on to the bill and got it changed at the junction, and made him go all the way there instead of letting him off at Packard. Some men are mean."

"*Do* you suppose that note was good?" repeated Dexter earnestly.

"I wish I knew where to get another just like it," grinned Connors. "Of course it was good. You're green yet, Deck. I'll forgive you this time; but don't you ever let another gay bluffer—especially one with a roll—get by you like that."

Dexter had no occasion to reply, for the conductor went forward again. The train was slowing down for another station, and the flagman had his own duties, although Connors would look out for the

ticket-taking during the rest of the trip. Dexter had taken the first step on the road of deceit, and instantly excuses and sophisms entered his mind to palliate the act.

Why should he give up that money to the corporation? He had practically been entrusted with it. He doubted if even legally the railroad company could hold the money.

If the real owner turned up he would, of course, hand the bank-note over to him; but suppose nobody could show a better right than *he* could show?

The nine points of possession impressed Dexter strongly just then.

He did not believe that the fat man would ever make claim for the thousand-dollar note. He was plainly frightened by what he had done, had escaped from the train at the first opportunity, and even if the railroad company advertised the money he would not dare come forward.

On the other hand, the real owner might never be found. Indeed, Dexter thought that the thousand-dollar bill could not easily be traced back to its previous possessor.

If the burglary had been "pulled off" lately he might learn through the papers how to return the bill. And he could do that himself just as well as the railroad company.

But if the right claimant did not come forward, why should *he* be denied for years the benefits of chance? A thousand dollars was worth more to him now than it ever would be again, or so it seemed to Dexter.

He told himself that he could make just as thorough a search for the true owner of the bank-note hidden away in his pocket as the railroad could. He would advertise. He would look up any recent robberies in which the thieves' spoil had included bills of large denominations.

Indeed, with the salve of promise he bedaubed his wounded conscience. Having begun by deceiving Connors, and proposing to deceive the whole world, he now tried to deceive himself.

He looked forward to the possibility of having, in the end, to give up the bank-note, too.

What could they do to him for not giving it up at once? He might lose his job, for he was breaking a rule of the road; but he was committing no crime. He was determined to do everything he could do to trace the ownership of the bill. Who would blame him if he refused to place it in the hands of the corporation, to be held in trust by them, and without benefit to himself, for a term of years?

"If nothing can be discovered of the owner in a few months—a few weeks, indeed"—Dexter told himself, "he'll *never* be found. I feel that it will be impossible to trace the thing, anyway. Why, my getting the note is actually providential. I need it. It might be the foundation of a neat little fortune for me. I know that Jeremiah Alger is a successful speculator in real-estate, and a thousand might be turned over two or three times in his hands, within a few months.

"Why not invest it with him instead of putting it in a bank to draw a paltry rate of interest, while the real owner is being searched for? If, years hence, the true ownership of the money is established, I will be in a position to hand it over, if I invest it well now.

"And—it means *our chance!* Marjorie's and mine. I said it would be one chance in a thousand if I could fulfil Uncle Alger's demand; and this is the thousandth chance. I'd be a fool to let it escape me. I'd wrong myself if I gave this money up without a struggle. I—I'd be wronging Marjorie as well."

But *that* declaration made him shudder. He knew it wasn't true. What he contemplated might not be *very* dishonest—there are gradations of dishonesty in the minds of the dishonest only—but Dexter knew very well that he could not tell Marjorie exactly how he came by the thousand-dollar bill if he used it.

He must have a secret from her. If he invested the money with Uncle Alger, as she had suggested, neither Marjorie nor her guardian must know *just* how the thousand dollars had reached his hands. Even after making such attempt as he might to find the true owner of the money, the ghost of discovery would ever be rising before him.

Would it spoil his life with the woman he loved? Would it build, in time, a barrier between them? Would he pay

for his stepping aside from the path of rectitude as other men had paid?

The horror of this possibility rose before Alfred Dexter. Had he not already become entangled in the web of deceit he would have shunned it now. But he could not tell Connors that he still held the thousand-dollar note. He would have injured his reputation without a chance to gain a farthing by his rash act.

No. Come what would, he would go on. So determined Alfred Dexter. And he was being borne onward by a train of unhappy circumstances as surely to an unexpected end, as the afternoon limited was bearing him to Freedom Junction.

CHAPTER IV.

CARRIED ON.

THE late dusk was empurpled by the electric street-lamps as Dexter swung up Main Street from the Hambleton station. He had run back from the junction on a local train with only a hasty bite at a lunch-counter, for he felt that he *must* see Marjorie this night.

Not that he had the first intention of telling her anything about the strange incident that had happened to him. But somehow he felt that he could not sleep unless he breathed the same air that she did.

He hoped, indeed, to gain some tranquillity from her own perfect innocence and repose. His own heart he felt to be an unswept and disorderly place, which was not even nice to look into.

The Alger cottage was on a side street —one of those pleasant, shady thoroughfares often found in suburban towns, where the houses are far enough apart to offer every encouragement for the young folks on the porches to make love.

The tall electric lights at either end of the block illuminated the street just dimly enough to make the situation romantic. In these strictly modern times young people fall in love under the light of the incandescent, rather than under the pale illumination of the moon.

Dexter had not stopped to shift to his ordinary clothes, and Marjorie caught the shine of his buttons, and knew him before he reached the gate. He saw her come quickly to the stoop from the vine-shade where the hammock hung to welcome him.

In her white dress her tall, slim figure looked almost ghostly. She was a willowy, graceful girl, with bands of brown hair drawn back upon either side of her head, over the pink ears, and wound in a great hoop above the nape of her white neck.

"Have you really come?" she whispered, stepping back with him so that their interlocked forms would not be so easily seen from the street. "I wondered if you would be so impatient that you must answer my letter in person. Dear boy!"

She patted his arm when she uttered this characteristic ejaculation, and the smile that always went with it charmed Dexter, but she floated away from him instantly when she had received and returned his caress of greeting.

She was neither coy, nor coquettish, but Marjorie Alger yielded herself only a moment to his embrace. Then they sat down, hand in hand, and she said roguishly:

"And you agree with Uncle Alger, dear boy?"

"Now, Marjorie, don't you think that's too bad? What does the old fellow mean? He was married himself once—he was young once. And yet he asks us to wait—and for such a ridiculous reason."

"*Do* take it in better spirit than that, Alfred. You don't know uncle—"

"And he must be a particularly unpleasant old chap, I fancy," grumbled the young man.

"You belie him. He's a fine old man—grumpy and choleric, perhaps, at times; but he's awfully kind—and awfully hard-headed. We ought to be glad to be guided by his judgment in business—"

"The business of getting married?" demanded Dexter.

"But what he says has weight, Alfred. It *must* have weight with you, even if you don't wish to accept it. Something *might* happen to you."

"You only see that side of it!" he cried, a good deal like a spoiled child who has been denied something he very much wants.

"*Do* I?" she repeated, and with a

quick glance that made the young man's heart throb more quickly.

"But I *know* I can take care of you, dear!" he cried.

"And so do I, dear boy," was her prompt reply. "But see it from *my* standpoint. Uncle has been the best of uncles to me. He has taken care of me for sixteen years. I might have been brought up by some charitable institution had it not been for him. When my own father deserted me Uncle Alger took me himself, adopted me, educated me, and, if we are patient, dear boy, I know he will do a great deal for the man I—I love."

This last was a whisper, but Dexter was touched on the raw nevertheless.

"I don't like to feel that we are waiting for dead men's shoes," he grumbled. "I don't want his money, Marjie—I want *you*. I'll risk making enough to keep us."

"But I think he will relent if we are patient for two years. One thing is, he thinks we are too young to marry," said the girl, with gravity.

"And do you think so, Marjie?"

The smile flashed into her brown eyes again, and the roguish dimples played hide and seek in her cheeks.

"You know," she said, with demureness, "I am quite grown up for my age. Everybody but uncle says so."

He could not help laughing, too. He knew that it was only because she felt it her duty, because of her uncle's long-continued kindness, that she held out against her lover's pleading.

"Well, well," Dexter murmured, with his arm about her, "what should you say if I surprised Uncle Alger by finding the thousand dollars before the two years are up?"

"I think he would be very favorably impressed, dear boy."

"And suppose I should find that sum very soon?" demanded Dexter, his voice suddenly shaking.

"Oh, *can* you, Alfred?" she cried, clasping her hands and looking at him.

What he saw in her eyes determined him. Innocent as her heart was, Marjorie Alger spurred her lover on in the path he had entered for the first time that day.

She showed him that waiting for the consummation of their hopes was hard for her, too. The chance to realize those hopes was within his grasp.

"I'll do it," he thought, and smote the place where the folded bank-note lay.

"Now, what's the matter?" she asked, smiling at him again.

"I've just made up my mind to surprise Uncle Alger, that's all," he said, with forced gaiety. "You'd better be thinking about your trousseau, my child."

Nothing further had he heard during the run to Freedom Junction of the owner of the thousand-dollar note, nor of the man who had given it into his keeping, and then denied his identity. Nor had any telegram met them along the way, or at the end of the run, inquiring about the fat stranger.

Nobody had said anything to Dexter about the bank-note. Connors himself seemed to have forgotten it. Never, it seemed, had a thing come about so easily.

He had been handed the thousand dollars; it was as much his as anybody's, as far as he then knew. His possession of it could scarcely be imagined by anybody but the fat man himself.

He went home on the ten-thirty-five, feeling that exuberance of spirit which always developed in him while he was with Marjorie. She was such jolly good company—and so lovable. Just to talk with her for an hour was an uplift for a fellow, and to-night she had driven the unhappy shadows in Dexter's mind into the background.

He went whistling to his boarding-house from the railroad station. It was a nice house, kept by a motherly woman, and it was full of railroad men. Some of them Dexter knew; some he had never chanced to see because their hours of work were so different from his own.

He had a good room on the second floor, and until this very night he had never noticed how rickety the door was, and how little protection the old-fashioned lock offered if one really wished to break in.

He had a thousand dollars in his clothes!

He had never feared being robbed before. He had carried some considerable sums of money with him, too; sometimes his own, sometimes belonging to those whom he had worked for.

But now, as he carefully turned the key in his door, he felt a sudden startling fear that he was in danger of losing that mysteriously acquired note. He actually opened the door of his clothes-closet and looked under his bed—the only hiding-places in his room.

"Lord!" he groaned. "I might be a spinster looking for the impossible man."

But he could not shake off the feeling. He sat down and smoked, and tried to read. The clock—a little brass affair that Marjorie had given him—ticked away toward midnight. It made so much noise at last that he arose and stopped it.

And then the silence in the house depressed him. He could not read, and flung aside the book.

"I might sleep," he thought.

But then at once the presence of the thousand-dollar note came uppermost. Where should he put it for safety? It would be easy enough for a burglar to creep in by the window, or force the lock of the door, and rob him. He did not consider just then that only one other soul in the world probably knew that the bill was in his hands.

But he was a heavy sleeper. He remembered that, and the thought stung him sharply. How easily he might be robbed while lying there unconscious.

The thought aroused his wit, however. He walked up and down the room a few times, drawing the stiff and crackling note through his fingers. The very *feel* of it was pleasing. It must be nice, he thought, to work in a bank, even if one counted other people's money all day.

In a vase on the mantel-shelf Mrs. Perkins, the lodging-house mistress, had placed a bundle of "spills" rolled out of colored papers. They were one of the good woman's small economies—they saved matches.

Dexter's eye lit on these, and he instantly selected one, unrolled it, spread the bank-bill inside, and rolled the two up together so tightly that it was hard to tell the spill from its mates. This satisfied him, oddly enough, and he went to bed with relief.

But, although the fear of being robbed had left him, he could not sleep. Suddenly what he had done, in its possible effect on his relations with Marjorie Alger, rolled in upon his mind in a flood of feeling.

He had begun to deceive her. He had never supposed that he would stoop so low as to deceive Marjorie. And to hide this thing from her was a crime—he felt it—he knew it!

Even should nobody appear to claim the thousand dollars, and he used it as Mr. Alger suggested, he would be making Marjorie benefit by the thing. It soiled her. In spite of her innocence, it soiled her.

He tossed on his mattress as though it were a gridiron instead; and the fever of his harried mind made the iron hot. He had already hinted to Marjorie that he might find the thousand dollars her uncle demanded, soon. She would expect further explanation, and he was not prepared to give it.

What should he tell her if he used the thousand-dollar bill? What should he tell her if he did *not* use it?

There was that chivalrous streak in Dexter's character which made him shrink from the thought of causing *any* woman trouble. And to cause anxiety, perhaps shame, to the girl he loved seemed actually appalling.

There was something sad—pathetic—in Marjorie's life, at the best. Always in the background was the fact that she had been abandoned.

Her mother had died when she was two years old. Tim Hartwell, her father, had been a teamster in Hambleton—rather a rough-and-ready sort of a person according to all Dexter had heard of him. He drank hard for some months after his wife's death, but he had hired a housekeeper to look out for the baby, and he seemed to take a great deal of comfort in Marjorie.

But the drinking told on Tim. His business could not stand it. He lost a pair of his best horses, and that crippled him. Then, one day, Hambleton knew him no more.

Creditors took everything but the baby. Even the housekeeper, a wretchedly heartless creature, left the child alone when she found that there was nobody to pay her pittance.

Jeremiah Alger, passing the house, which was a rather lonely cottage on the outskirts of Hambleton, heard the child's

cry. He went in, and found the baby-girl weeping on the floor.

Mr. Alger did a very characteristic thing. He kicked the bottom out of a chair, shook his fist in the air, and said, "Damn!" very loudly. This seemed to please Miss Marjorie. She stopped crying, and chuckled at him. He picked her up, wrapped her in his overcoat, and carried her home, where she had continued to laugh at what she called his "tantrums" for sixteen years.

Even Dexter had to admit that Marjorie was not to be blamed for deferring to her uncle's request regarding the marriage. He understood that Jeremiah Alger was a queer but decidedly kind-hearted man.

And the misfortune of her babyhood was enough for the girl to suffer. Should he, Dexter asked himself, run the risk of bringing more trouble to her door? He lay and tossed, and thought about the thousand-dollar note rolled up in the spill in the vase on the mantelpiece.

CHAPTER V.

DEEPER IN IT.

SOMEWHERE toward morning he fell asleep. And, it being so late an hour after so wearisome a day, he was only awakened at last by a heavy thumping at his door.

"Get up! Get up, Mr. Dexter! It's a quarter to eight!" cried the landlady's voice.

And his train left for Selsburg in half an hour!

He bounded out upon the floor and began to rush on his clothing. Not a thought at the moment for what had happened to him the day before. He had forgotten the trouble of mind he suffered before dropping to sleep; he did not remember the thousand-dollar bill. His mind was only taken up with the exasperation of the moment, dealing with the fact that he had overslept. He might even be "called on the carpet" by the division superintendent, known among the employees of the southern branch of the F., L. and C. as "Old Helen Blazes," though there was nothing at all feminine about the man himself.

But then, when he was half dressed, the whole remembrance of his yesterday afternoon's trip, and what had grown out of it, flooded Dexter's mind. He rushed to the mantelpiece and seized the vase of spills.

He tumbled them all out on the table. In which had he rolled up that precious engraved paper? He had forgotten the color of it even, and they all looked about of a size.

With trembling fingers he unscrewed first one and then another of the spirals of paper. Actually, he could not get at the right one. The fear that had gripped him in the night when he had hidden the bank-note again shook him.

Suppose somebody had spied upon him in some way when he rolled up the money in the spill, and had, after he was asleep, crept in and stolen it?

Dexter tottered to the door. It was still locked. The window could only be opened a few inches from the top, and was nailed. Of course a robbery was out of the question.

He went back to the table, picked up another of the paper spirals, unrolled it, and the precious green and yellow document dropped out. He pounced upon it with a cry of delight. Then he thought: "How shall I keep it with me to-day, and run no chance of losing it?"

He was in his undershirt and trousers, and, looking down at his chest, he saw that the hem of the shirt was ripped. This made a tiny pocket, and in a moment the crackly bill was tucked into it, and he fastened the ripped seam with a pin.

Then he hustled into the rest of his clothing, dashed some water into his face and eyes, combed out his thick hair, and ran every step to the station.

Although he went without his breakfast, he got a call-down from Harry Connors.

"You will have to cut out that girl of yours, Deck, if it's going to keep you up all night," remarked the conductor. "You look as though you hadn't slept for a week. Get a brace on you, my dear man."

Dexter might have felt hurt by this had he not had so much else of importance on his mind just then. Actually, the place where the thousand-dollar bill lay on his chest seemed as hot as fire.

He couldn't forget it—not for a minute. And his principal thought this morning was how to get rid of the money. The picture which his anxiety had shown him overnight, of Marjorie Alger suffering because of *his* defection from the path of strict virtue, was enough for Dexter. He w. s determined now to leave no stone unturned to find the real owner of the money that had so strangely come into his possession.

He had no idea yet of giving it up to the railroad company. Indeed, as he had gone so far, it would probably have cost him his position to do so. He must begin the quest himself, and do everything in his power to trace the true ownership of that bank-note.

There were just two safe ways he could see by which to accomplish this. He could not go to the police without being questioned, and questioning would bring out facts of which Dexter was already ashamed. The police would look up his record, would find out all about his getting the bill, and would learn that he had intentionally deceived Harry Connors.

These facts would at once make him an object of police suspicion. The whole affair might be published in the newspapers, and if it came to the ears of his employers he would surely get called on the carpet. No, he didn't want anything to do with the police if he could help it.

Such inquiries as could be made he proposed to open himself. There was the way of advertising in the personal columns of the newspapers, and the second way of writing the people who had been lately robbed of large sums of money.

Most likely whoever had owned the thousand-dollar bill before the fat man got his clutches on it had kept the number of it, and would be able to prove property.

Dexter had two hours to himself in Selsburg. He had collected several morning papers in his car coming over from the junction, and he read them through religiously to see if he could find any hint that might help him in his search. Something might have happened in Selsburg itself that would put him on the track.

The haste in which the fat stranger boarded the train the previous afternoon might point to some recent trouble in which he had been entangled, and Dexter read sharply the Selsburg news items.

There was nothing to warrant further examination, nor did he see mentioned anywhere in the day's papers a robbery that fitted the case in hand. Every second-story thief, or petty highwayman, didn't have the luck to get thousand-dollar bills from his victims.

But Dexter knew that a good deal more so-called "news" than was in the papers never appears in print.

A wealthy and influential man is robbed under circumstances that he is not anxious to have publicly known. Either the facts are garbled for publication, or are suppressed altogether. So, with the idea still in his mind that the robbery, or whatever it was the fat man had been engaged in, had happened just before the afternoon limited left the station the day previous, he made certain inquiries.

He found a couple of the railroad men who had been at the gate when the stranger burst through and ran after the moving train. They remembered the incident very well—they remembered the man himself—but they had never seen him before, nor did they know anything about him. Nothing out of the ordinary had happened in the station the day before; and, in fact, there wasn't a clue that Dexter could get hold of.

But he had some time still at his disposal, and the Selsburg Public Library was near the station. He went there, found what daily papers they had on file, selected one, and began to read back, from day to day, for the month previous.

Before it was time for him to report for the afternoon run he had taken notes of several robberies which might fit the crime that he felt sure the fat man had committed.

There were two banks—both some distance away—and a big business house in Cincinnati that had had its safe cracked when there was a good deal of cash in it. That evening he spent in his room concocting letters to be sent to the three concerns mentioned in the news items.

He wrote them that he was so situated that he did not wish to appear publicly in the matter, but he had obtained

a bank-note of large denomination in such a peculiar way that he believed the party from whom he obtained it was its dishonest possessor. He asked for a list of the numbers of any large notes which the institutions to which he wrote had lost at the time they were robbed.

And he asked that the answers might be sent to "B. J. Jenks, General Delivery, Selsburg P. O."

In his letters he had stated that, once assured that the institution he wrote to had possessed the bank-note then in his hands, he would privately divulge all he knew of the possible thief and the circumstances which had placed the note in his own possession.

He had written these letters with extreme care, and by having any answers come to him under an assumed name to the Selsburg post-office, where he was not known, Dexter believed that he would never be suspected in the matter.

If he could not find the true owner of that thousand-dollar bill, he was quite as desirous as ever of keeping it. But he proposed to do all in his power to return the money first. The temptation of converting it to his own use, whether or no, he had put away from him for good and all.

His single sin, he believed, had been in intentionally deceiving Harry Connors. He would go no deeper in the mire.

And he wrote a letter to Marjorie—as he did thrice a week—and found that he could address her with fuller courage than on the previous evening. When a man's intentions are good—*or he thinks they are*—he feels no fear of the good woman whom he loves.

The next day at Selsburg he spent some time in the library again, and found several other robberies recounted in the files of the newspapers that he believed should be looked up. These ran back for at least six weeks. Dexter did not think that the fat man could have stolen the thousand-dollar note longer ago than that, and still have kept it in his possession.

The following day he looked for replies from his first letters, and as soon as the train was in, and he was free, he hurried over to the Selsburg post-office. It had never occurred to him to disguise himself in any way. He was in full uniform, and proposed to call at the window of the General Delivery Bureau for anything addressed to B. J. Jenks.

He had the names of the people from whom he expected answers, and believed he could satisfy the queries of the man at the window.

As for being held up and examined by anybody else, that was farthest from his mind when he entered the door. He had not even considered the possibility of either of the parties he had written to conceiving the idea of having the post-office watched for the purpose of having him nabbed when he inquired for mail for the fictitious Jenks, to whom he had had it addressed.

But as he came through the swinging baize-covered door into the corridor of the office his gaze chanced to be directed at the floor. Not ten feet from the door he saw a most uncompromising-looking pair of square-toed shoes, of about number ten. They belonged to a pair of sturdy legs, which themselves were connected with a stocky trunk, ending—as his gaze mounted swiftly higher—in a thick, red neck, capped by a bullet head, the hair on which bristled like that of a shoe-brush.

The face of the man was hard, reddened by the weather, and he sported a bristly mustache, too, and a huge diamond scarf-pin in the shape of a whip and stirrup, lovingly entwined.

Now, Alfred Dexter was just as observant as the next man. Those solid underpinnings had instantly smitten him with suspicion.

If the man in those boots was not a cop, he wore a cop's shoes. Those broad, heavy-soled shoes were made for walking the pavement; and although there was no sign of a uniform about the man, Dexter was instantly convinced that he *should* have been in blue clothes, with white stripes down the seams of his trousers, and a couple of rows of brass buttons on his coat, with a stout baton in his belt.

He was typically the policeman in plain clothes, waiting to catch some miscreant that he thought his uniform might scare.

And who was that miscreant? Who was he waiting for here in the post-

office? Had one of the parties Dexter had written to been ungrateful enough to put the police "on"?

As pointed out, the young man had never dreamed of that possibility before. But now it came home to him hard—so hard that he accepted the suspicion as correct at once, and—

He walked calmly to the stamp window, purchased some stamps he did not need, and strolled out without a single glance at the General Delivery window.

(To be continued.)

THREE DRINKS AND OUT.

By C. REID WORRALL.

The man who wanted a job bad, and the extraordinary circumstances which caused him to disgust his prospective employer.

"YES, I'm up against it, Carrington, and up against it hard."

Billy Fleet looked his friend steadily in the eye, although it cost him an effort to do so. He felt inclined to hang his head.

"Why in the name of all the good-natured saints didn't you let me know all about it sooner? You know very well that anything I might be able to do to help you, I'd do willingly. Why didn't you come to me?"

Carrington was evidently displeased, but his tone indicated genuine concern.

"Not so fast, Dick; not so fast. I was not afraid you'd pass me up. But, you see, I thought I might pull through all right alone and while there seemed to be any chance—well, you know we're all ready to take a chance. I—"

"But," interrupted Carrington, "you went too far for your good health.

"Why, we used to be as thick as two thieves at home. You knew I was here. Didn't you know where to find me?"

"Yes, but there still seemed a chance. Again — well, frankly, my pride was stabbed. I couldn't bear the idea of coming to you like a beggar, asking for assistance. This is my first experience of the sort, you know," and Fleet flushed.

"The last, too, I hope," put in Carrington. Then, in a puzzled tone, he went on:

"What I cannot altogether comprehend is just how you drifted into the mess. You haven't made friends with the bottle? It couldn't be that."

"How can you ask that? You know how I always detested the stuff. No, it wasn't that," Fleet replied. "It appears to have been due entirely to a combination of unfortunate circumstances. Dame Fortune has simply had her back toward me for some while. It all dates from the time Cross and I entered into partnership. You know what the venture was. When the crash came, we lost everything."

He paused a second, and then asked:

"Were you ever down and out, Dick —compelled to figure with the stub of a pencil what you could afford for the next day's feed — then, when the next day arrived, lose the stub?"

"Yes. I was," replied Carrington. "Once—and that was a plentiful sufficiency. I can smile now, when I think of my condition then, and some day that old smile of yours will come back, Billy, when you think of this."

The meeting—a fortunate one for Fleet—had been accidental. Having nowhere in particular as a destination, and plenty of time to get there, he had stopped on a corner, and, with hands stuffed into his empty pockets, stood dejectedly surveying a group of enthusiastic fans, anxiously awaiting the posting of the next-inning figures on the board of a Broadway newspaper office.

Hurrying up-town, but pausing a moment to scan the bulletin, Carrington's quick eye had spied Fleet. His ready intuition told him that something was wrong. His questions, and final demand to know the truth, had elicited Fleet's admission.

A new suspicion now formed itself, and he decided to exercise tact in fol-

lowing it up. Examining his watch, he remarked casually:

"It's way past time for lunch, but I haven't had a chance for a bite since breakfast. I'm pretty empty. Will you join me? Come along."

He took the other by the arm and led the way.

"In here," he added, as they approached a smart café. "It's a right decent place."

"Quite different from my sort lately," commented Fleet as they entered. "I've been down to ham and beans at the cheap lunch-counters at fifteen cents per copy."

II.

"WITH the training he has had, I think he's just the man for the place," Carrington was saying to Mr. Stewart, junior member of a firm of Wall Street brokers. "He's bright, energetic, and shrewd, and has the experience I speak of to back his ambition."

"I shall be pleased to consider your friend, Carrington," replied the financier. "If he's all you claim for him, he ought to fit in quite well."

"I assure you I heartily appreciate your kindness in the matter, Mr. Stewart. If there is at any time any possibility of my reciprocating, be sure to let me know. You can reach Mr. Fleet at this address at any time."

Carrington handed the broker his own card.

"He's stopping with me for the present," he added.

"Very well. Just as soon as I have time to see him, I'll send him word. Good day, Carrington. Thank you for calling my attention to Mr. Fleet."

As Carrington made his way toward his own office, he felt a great degree of satisfaction. He knew he had not overrated Billy's ability in his talk with Stewart, and he was sure his friend would prove a valuable acquisition to the broker's staff.

Learning of the vacancy by chance, he had immediately decided to turn his acquaintance with the junior of the firm to whatever advantage he might in the interest of Fleet.

When closing time finally arrived, after a hot and busy afternoon, he hurried home, anxious to inform Fleet of the prospect he had unearthed.

"It's the opportunity of your good young life, Bill, my boy," he declared, slapping his friend on the shoulder. "Those people are so moneyed they can't count their chips. I believe I created a favorable impression, so you need not be surprised to hear from Stewart at any time. He's a peculiar sort of fellow in many respects, but never mind that. Just play your natural wit with him, and your chances are royal."

Fleet received the good news with unmistakable welcome. After all he had gone through, he would have considered any proposition that might afford a chance to become just independent once more, and not a patient in Carrington's charity ward. To be given an opportunity such as this was, in his estimation, little short of providential.

"Now, to celebrate, even if it is in advance," went on Carrington, "we'll take in one of the roof performances."

They had listened through the first portion of the program, seated well back.

"You don't drink, old man, but you may as well have something soft," suggested Carrington when the curtain dropped.

He ordered a fizz for himself. Fleet took a tall lemonade.

"You're lucky never to have grown a thirst, Fleet, for it's expensive, to say the least. But you'll find in here that they almost all have one. If you look around, you can notice it. Holds good with the women as well as the men—Ah!" Carrington exclaimed. "Over there's Willmore, one of the force. Will you meet him? Good fellow, Willmore. Or would you rather wait a minute till I come back?"

"I'll amuse myself here for a while, Dick. Don't hurry—I'll not run away."

Carrington finished his fizz, and with the remark, "All right. Back in just a minute," he moved to a near-by table.

Fleet scanned his program in a desultory manner and fell to musing.

At an adjoining table a party of four were conversing gaily, skipping from one topic to another, filling in the time till the next rise of the curtain. Fleet

could not avoid overhearing their chatter, but paid no attention to their conversation until one of the number spoke a name—a name recently become familiar to him.

The speaker was a distinguished-looking gentleman. The word which attracted Fleet was "Stewart."

"Stewart, you know," he was saying, "has some few very remarkable eccentricities."

At the first word Fleet's attention firmly caught. What he heard astounded him.

A little later Carrington returned to his place, but the second scene was on, and Fleet made no mention of what he had caught in his unavoidable eavesdropping.

III.

"MR. FLEET? Ah, yes; show him in here, please. You are right on time, I see, Mr. Fleet; a very good habit—punctuality. You probably wondered at my request that you meet me here at the club, but it's the only opportunity I shall have for several days to see you, and I need a man at once."

This news pleased Fleet considerably; but, although he believed it a circumstance in his favor, he was too wise to betray his thoughts by word or action, and merely replied:

"Your own convenience is mine, Mr. Stewart."

"If it is always so, you may be of considerable use to me," was the broker's comment. "We'll go in to dinner at once. We can talk the matter over there at ease."

The two entered the grill, and, when seated, Stewart asked:

"Will you begin with a Martini?"

Fleet had been asked the same before now, but had invariably declined to drink. His hatred for intoxicants in any form was hereditary. But in the present instance he hesitated slightly. His host noticed the hesitation, and repeated the question:

"A Martini, or have you another preference?"

Fleet could not evade the point. He wished he might. Had the invitation come from another, under any circumstances other than the present, he would promptly have refused. But he now accepted the cocktail.

He drank little more than half the contents of the glass, but felt an almost instantaneous effect. He could not have described clearly the sensation it produced.

Twice his host repeated the order during the progress of the dinner, taking, however, nothing himself. With the second drink, Fleet could feel the peculiar sensation growing upon him. His lips began to take on a strange numbness; a fine-beaded perspiration formed on his forehead, although the room was comfortably cool. He experienced a rapidly increasing tingling in his fingers and legs. Yet he did not decline the third glass.

By the time the dinner was over, and Stewart sat back to enjoy a huge Havana, Billy began to sense a helplessness overtaking him which he found it utterly impossible to shake off, try as he might.

His host's manner had changed visibly, but to Billy the change was not apparent. The older man now continued the conversation, receiving only laconic replies from his companion. A drowsiness had completely paralyzed Fleet; and on receiving no answer to a question of considerable importance, Stewart discovered Fleet settled deep in his chair, asleep.

The host then adopted the only course open to him, and a look of the deepest disgust showed on his face as he assisted the young man from the room and to a waiting taxi.

IV.

CARRINGTON was more than surprised when he heard the details of Fleet's disgraceful behavior of the previous night gathered over the telephone from the Wall Street office. He was at a perfect loss to understand it. He was, at the same time, deeply chagrined by the thing, and could only assert, in his friend's defense:

"Why, I've never known of Fleet touching a drop of anything intoxicating in his life, and I've known him for years."

"I'm sorry it occurred," Stewart re-

plied. "He sized up very well at first. But you realize that it is impossible to use such a man in this position. I couldn't think of doing so."

Carrington had not roused Billy that morning to ask the result of the interview with Stewart. On waking late the poor fellow realized dumbly the events of the night before, but could not recall how it all ended. The knowledge that it had certainly ended very badly struck him with a sickening force.

His despair knew no bounds. Probably—yes, assuredly—his asinine conduct had blocked all hope. Why had he been so innately witless?

V.

Two nights later. The broker was again at his club where Fleet's downfall had been compassed. Stewart was engrossed in the details of a scare-head story of the Street when his senior partner entered and interrupted the perusal of the account.

"Can you forego that lurid narrative long enough to shake hands with your double?" Reinhold inquired.

He was accompanied by another gentleman, whom he introduced as:

"Your double, phonetically — Mr. Stuart. He's interested in grain. Not on the field, but on the Chicago floor."

The introduction over, the three brokers were soon absorbed in a discussion of the day's events.

"By the way," broke in Reinhold, addressing his partner, "not apropos of the point we were just considering, but I was told to-day of your having taken a load in charge at dinner the other evening. Hope you won't mind my reverting to the subject. I know there must have been some mistake. But I am curious. I am fully aware of your aversion, you know."

"That was a young man I had in mind for the staff. It was our first meeting, and he actually got so loaded he fell asleep. I shipped him home in a hurry. Sorry, too, for I was favorably impressed with the fellow until he showed himself so impossible."

"May I ask how he acted under the influence?" inquired Stuart. "I am interested."

"He shut up like a clam."

"A very good trait," was Stuart's comment.

"Of course, we could not use a man such as he showed himself."

"It is a peculiar coincidence," began Stuart. "Since I first became an employer I have been of the belief that such a test as that of liquor might prove of value in the selection of men for positions of trust. I have never applied the test, but feel positive it would be useful."

"Rather a unique idea, I should say," remarked Stewart.

"I have observed numerous men under such conditions," Stuart continued, "and have noticed that the real person shows out then when the clear brain is not on the alert to keep up the mask."

At this juncture a club attendant entered, and announced that Mr. Carrington was waiting to see Mr. Stewart.

"Say that I'll be out in a minute," answered Stewart.

He excused himself, and, entering the reception-room, greeted his caller.

"I've been chasing you all evening," began Carrington. "Wanted to see you in regard to Fleet. It's all a dreadful nightmare, this business. Fleet has explained to me that shortly before his interview with you he had overheard a remark passed by a stranger on a roof-garden in which your name, Stewart, was mentioned. He understood that you had certain peculiar beliefs regarding the use of liquor, and when he met you here that evening, it was with the complete expectation you intended to intoxicate him."

"Oh, I see," a wave of comprehension sweeping over the broker. "They must have been talking about the other Stuart. He's just been explaining his decidedly unique theory. Where is Fleet now?"

"He's here."

"Show him up."

A minute later Fleet entered, and the three joined the two other brokers.

The moment Fleet's glance met that of Reinhold he recognized in the broker the man whose remark he had overheard on the roof-garden.

"I believe," he said, addressing Stewart frankly, "that Mr. Reinhold will

corroborate me in the statement that but a few evenings ago he was discussing with some friends a peculiarity identified with one Stewart."

"You are right, young man, I was. Stuart, I hope you'll forgive me. I knew your belief on this subject, and remarked about it."

Then Stewart came forward.

"So," said he, "you anticipated a test in liquor for yourself?"

"A fact—I did, Mr. Stewart," replied the now hopeful Billy. "I am not in the drinking line myself, and so— Well, you know the rest."

"I'm glad the truth has come out," assured Stewart. "Very glad. Come in to-morrow."

THE SPY OF VALLEY FORGE.*

By ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE,

Author of "The Crimson Harvest," "From Flag to Flag," "On Glory's Trail," etc.

Mishaps galore, even to a falling out with Washington himself, that checkered the career of one soldier in the War for Independence.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

RALPH DALE, an erstwhile actor, who has entered the service of General George Washington as a spy, is recognized in Philadelphia, one day in 1777, and chased by a mob of British sympathizers. In the scuffle which follows he loses his coat, in which is sewn an important paper containing news concerning the English. He escapes from his pursuers only to encounter an English fop, Sir Harvey Digby, whom he knocks unconscious and proceeds to strip of his satin garments. Disguised as the Englishman, Dale again escapes detection, but is about to be caught once more, when he saves himself by jumping into the carriage of Miriam Dacre, an heiress and beauty, whose cousin he had known during his acting days. He passes himself off as the long-lost cousin, and is taken to some British festivities by the girl. There he gets hold of a despatch sent by Colonel Tarleton to Sir William Howe, and changes the wording so that the troops of General Washington at Valley Forge are represented to be in a strong instead of weak condition.

Miriam asks him why he appears so worried, and he is about to answer, when he hears the voice of Sir Harvey Digby, and in the excitement of the moment knocks off his wig, revealing himself to her, a total stranger.

CHAPTER VI.

A SLEIGHT-OF-HAND GAME WITH FATE.

FOR full thirty seconds we remained as still as if posing in a tableau, Miriam Dacre and I, staring one at the other. She had half risen, her dainty, high-bred face frozen into a look of incredulous amaze.

I, bereft of my disguising periwig, stood dumfounded, shamefaced. My yellow hair had fallen over my eyes, and it was on the hair, rather than on my face itself, that Miriam's gaze at length rested. It was by the color of my tawny mane she had first known I was not black-haired Fred Dacre.

Now, divested of the great wig, my whole visage must at once have corroborated her discovery.

She had not seen Dacre since she was a child. Then he had been a tall, hobbledehoy collegian. Seeing me in wig and white satin, it was but natural that my random words to Mary Dows should have deceived Miriam into mistaking me for Dacre.

He and I were of a height, and were by no means unlike in general appearance.

I cursed myself heartily for my deception. I am glad now to remember that at the moment it was her horror, rather than my newly added peril, that most concerned me.

And so we faced each other, the strewn

* *Began October* ARGOSY. *Single copies, 10 cents.*

red roses from the fallen vase carpeting the space between us. But between us also had risen, all at once, a barrier higher than the Appalachians themselves. I felt like one suddenly shut out of paradise after setting foot on its threshold.

A little gasping sob from the girl broke the spell. She pressed her white fingers to her eyes in an oddly childish gesture and ran from the room, taking with her, somehow, all that was beautiful in life.

With a start, I came to myself. The din in the theater had increased and was drawing closer. I snatched up that wretched periwig, shook the water-drops from it, and clapped it back on my head. Then, with the languid step and mask-like face of utter boredom, I sauntered forth to the noisy auditorium.

The commotion surged about one rapidly swelling group of cavaliers, whose center was a bald-headed, red-faced man, clad in the gray suit of a Quaker. He was talking wildly, with many gesticulations.

I had already recognized the voice. Now I knew the face for Sir Harvey Digby's, and the hastily donned garments for my own Quaker suit. Yes, even to the coat whose skirts contained my precious plans and statistics.

"I tell you I am *not* drunk!" Digby was shrieking. "Scrape me raw if I have tasted wine or spirits this two hours. 'Tis as I've twice told you. That murd'rous Yankee spy—Ralph Dale, the blockhead watch captain named him—came upon me unawares and struck me down. He pilfered my court suit, leaving these monstrous shabby rags in their place. I had to put these on, perforce, for covering's sake, till I can get to my rooms and change. But first of all I came here direct to warn Sir Henry and General Howe that the fellow's at large, and to have him laid by the heels forthwith."

"Sir Henry is at his headquarters, ill," said André soothingly, "and General Howe has gone to the barracks with a report from Tarleton. Best let me call a chair and have you sent to your rooms. Turning our little revels into a Bedlam, as you are doing, will scarce avail to catch the spy. Come away, I beg. The ladies—"

"As you will," grumbled Digby, "but I—zounds! If yon is not my flowered waistcoat!"

He had caught sight of me standing against the wall of the auditorium near the stage, and lurched toward me with clawlike fingers outspread. I kept quiet by vast effort of will-power, and even forced to my drawn face a smile of faint amusement.

"Where got ye that waistcoat?" roared Digby. "Tell me that! And—by the magic sword of St. George, the precious villain hath my whole suit as well! Oh, monstrous! 'Tis the spy himself! Here, under our very noses! Watch, ho! A *spy!* Seize him, gentlemen, I pray ye! I apprehend him red-handed. A Yankee spy—and a most egregious thief, as well!"

I wonder if you think I bolted? If so, you have a sadly distorted idea of us who live by our wits, and who daily hold starvation and death itself at arm's length by sheer power of brain.

I looked the maddened accuser over from head to foot through my quizzing glass, as I might have eyed a curious wild beast. Then, with a shrug, and edging nearer the stage, as though to avoid the clutch of his straining fingers, I daintily flicked with my lace handkerchief the sleeve of my coat where his clawing hand had touched, and glanced across at André.

"Captain," I drawled, "is this some unannounced feature of your Mischianza revels? If so, I commend it as a merry novelty. But I regret that I, a comparative stranger here, should have been chosen as its butt."

"I offer ten thousand pardons, my dear Dacre," apologized André, stepping between me and the sputtering, infuriated Digby. "Believe me, 'tis not my fault that Sir Harvey should have chosen this as the scene for his delirium tremens, or that he should pick out a Dacre as his victim. Pray overlook it, for the sake of good-fellowship."

It did me good to see the doubtful faces of the bystanders grow clear of suspicion at André's words and at the mention of the name "Dacre."

To most of them I was a total stranger, and Digby was well known. But with André vouching for me, the tables turned

with ridiculous quickness. A titter, then a roar of laughter, arose at the luckless baronet's antics.

I breathed more easily.

"I tell you," screamed Digby, forcibly held back by two of his acquaintances—"I tell you 'tis the Yankee spy! And he's wearing my clothes. Odds zooks! Are ye all mad, that you stand by and let him escape? Don't I know my own raiment? He is wearing it. Yes, down to the sword itself! Look at the initial, picked out with diamonds, on the hilt. *Look* at it! A 'D,' is it not? For 'Digby.' 'Twas made for me at—"

I drew the sword carelessly from the sheath and held it out, hilt foremost, for all to gaze upon. Sure enough, there, on the pommel, blazed the letter "D."

"Thus far the worthy maniac is quite right," I laughed. "My sword-hilt does bear that initial. He seems to forget that 'D' stands for 'Dacre,' as well as for 'Digby.' And, for that matter, it also stands for 'Dunce,' 'Dolt,' and 'Dullard.'"

A polite laugh—yet more hearty than the mild witticism warranted — broke from the bystanders and served as a red rag to Digby's impotent rage.

"D'ye tell me I don't know my own sword?" he fumed. "Are ye all blind, that ye can't see this is a cheap trickster? Dacre, eh? *What* Dacre? I know the Dacres, root and branch."

"It is an odd situation for introductions," laughed André, "but by all means let us observe the niceties of etiquette. Mr. Dacre, this is my usually sane and non-bibulous friend, Sir Harvey Digby, baronet, of Shropshire. Sir Harvey, I beg to present the Hon. Frederic Dacre, Esq., of Hants, nephew to the late Lord— "

"Fred Dacre?" squealed Digby in semitearful sarcasm. "Fred Dacre, forsooth! Ho!"

I had been on the point of returning my weapon to its sheath. Now, as if forgetting to sheathe the sword, I held it idly in my hands, fingering the hilt and the blade.

I noted that the latter—as was, of course, more common with court swords than rapiers—had a razor-keen edge. On edge and point I might at any moment be forced to rely for my life. But I would not cast off the mask of suave amusement until I had to. I knew my placid, smiling face might stand between me and detection.

Again the "conjurer" was to the fore. Decidedly, every would-be diplomatist should take at least a short course in magic, if only for the perfect dissimulation it teaches.

"Fred Dacre!" repeated Digby, finding coherent speech at last. "A fine tale, egad! Fred and I were at Eton together. And again we were comrades on the tedious Indian voyage two years ago. This spy is no more like Fred Dacre than I am like—"

"A sane man?" I finished. "That is quite likely."

"Digby," remonstrated André, "for the love of Heaven, call back your senses! Mr. Dacre came here to-night with his cousin, Miss Miriam Dacre. Surely, she should know her own cousin better than you. You are absurd—laughable. Come away, I beg. The farce will begin in another minute, and we are blocking the view of the stage. If—"

"In that waistcoat," yelled Digby, "is a watch bearing my full monogram on its back. The fob hanging now from his pocket holds the Digby crest-seal. If he be Fred Dacre, or any honest man, let him hand over that watch and fob for inspection. If they bear not my monogram and crest, I will most humbly apologize. Or I will grant him such satisfaction as his honor may demand. Let him hand the watch to André, or to—"

"This is ridiculous," protested André. "Come—"

"I think," spoke up an elderly officer, "if Mr. Dacre does not object, it—it is a good idea. It might satisfy our tipsy friend Digby and make him leave the place quietly. Would you object to handing your watch to André, or to me, or to any one else, Mr. Dacre? Believe me, I only ask it because Digby says he will be convinced by the test. And, drunk or sober, I have ever found him a man of his word. 'Twill silence him and let the play go on."

"Perhaps you are right, Wharton," agreed André. "Dacre, 'tis a monstrous imposition, but—would you *greatly* object?"

"By no means!" I replied, with the chilly stiffness of an embarrassed man who is asked to compromise his own rights. "If your maniac friend can only be silenced by my parting with a watch, I will do so gladly. I suppose I should be grateful that his whim does not lead him into asking me to remove my wig or shoes or hose. Who will become custodian of the treasure?"

Peevishly I yanked the watch and fob from my pocket and thrust them into the thick of the group.

Then, sulkily, I turned on my heel and walked to the stage, leaning against the four-foot platform, bearing myself like one whose dignity has been grossly imposed upon.

André followed me, his handsome face flushed with genuine annoyance.

"Dacre," he exclaimed, "this treatment to which you have been subjected is abominable! I am sorrier than I can say. Digby is an ass! But I thank you for yielding so gracefully to his crazy demand."

"Don't mention it," I snapped. "I trust he is quite satisfied by now. I note that his howls have ceased."

"Hey!" cried a fat man in peach-blow silk. "André, we're in the deuce of a pickle! Where's the watch? *You* haven't got it, have you?"

"Saints and martyrs!" broke forth André. "Digby isn't accusing *me*, too, of stealing his possessions, is he? I must—"

"No, no!" fumed the fat man. "You don't understand. Plague take it all! The watch has *vanished*."

"Has—*what?*" gasped André.

"Vanished, disappeared—melted into thin air!" reiterated the other. "Mr. Dacre handed it to some one—no one seems to know to whom. And—no one's got it."

"Gad!" I groaned. "*Now* the idiot will be wanting me to give over the rest of my jewelry. If this is a Mischianza jest, I can only regret—"

"Zounds!" interrupted the fat man. "'Tis no joke, I can tell you. You handed the watch to *one* of us. Yet, none will admit receiving it. You—you don't chance to remember to *which* of us you gave it, I presume?"

"Why," I reflected hesitatingly, "I was a bit piqued, and I put the watch in the nearest man's hand, scarce noting. I—my impression is that it was *you* to whom—"

"No!" ejaculated the fat man, turning purple. "It was *not* I. Of that I can take oath. But I distinctly saw you hand it to *some one*. And—"

"In the meantime," I sneered, "I seem to be 'out' a rather valuable timepiece. I trust your insane friend, Digby, is quite content. By the way, was it *he* to whom I gave it? A search might be interesting."

"Oh, the whole thing is a disgusting mystery!" grunted the fat man, as Digby, breaking away from the rest, came again toward us.

Now, you who are on the "inside" of my story have probably long since solved the watch's "mystery." For those who have not, let me say it was a variation of the very simplest of all known conjuring tricks—one that every amateur learns at the very start of his practise.

As I had thrust the watch forward into the group, I had deftly "palmed" it. Then, to avoid drawing attention to my closed hand, I had attracted the notice of the others by the pettish manner in which I had flounced away to the foot of the stage platform.

My back momentarily turned to them, I had slipped the watch in among the lace ruffles of my sleeve, where it still lay, ticking away honestly, and quite out of sight. Nevertheless, for greater safety, I still dawdled with the unsheathed sword, neglecting to run it back into its scabbard.

Digby was at me again, scarce restrained by André's barring arm from seizing me bodily.

"My watch is gone," he howled, "but you are none the less what I said you were—a spy and a thief! And I'll expose you if it's my last deed on earth!"

"Come, come," urged André, with some authority, "you have made mischief enough. Must we take you away by force? When you are sober you will regret acting the fool like this. We—"

"In the pocket of that coat you are wearing," Digby shouted at me, "are letters addressed to *me*. My name is embroidered on the silken lining of that waistcoat. I demand that you—"

"This passes all bounds!" I cried in mock horror. "Does the man ask me to disrobe in a crowded theater? Is this a British festivity—this Mischianza of yours—or the anteroom of a madhouse? I protest—"

But Digby, darting past André, had seized me by the arm, as though he would rip the very coat from my back. The others caught him, and I saw by their faces that this last act of violence would result in Digby's instant expulsion. I laughed into the baronet's distorted face, from utter triumph.

Then, as with a final wrench they tore him free from my arm, he made a furious grab at my sleeve. The ruffles came away in his grasp.

Down to the wooden floor, in front of us all, clattered the watch. In my moment of victory Fate had played me the scurviest trick yet. I stood exposed!

CHAPTER VII.

I BECOME AN OUTCAST.

LUCKILY, the British military mind in those days did not always work with lightning rapidity. By the time that horrible watch touched the ground I was well aware of what its presence there meant for me. But the rest of the men for a moment stood looking down at it.

Digby, with a wheeze of delight, pounced upon his recovered timepiece. And, as he did so, I seized him by the shoulder, catching him unprepared, spinning him around and grabbing him by the long skirts of his Quaker coat.

While his friends were still wondering at my swift maneuver, there was a flash of steel, a sharp *purr* of sheared cloth—and the keen sword-edge had severed the skirts from the body of his coat.

Once more my Quaker coat-skirts, with their valuable contents, were in my possession. Scarce had I time to stuff them bulkily into the breast of my flowered waistcoat, when Digby and three of the others had hurled themselves at me.

Again I was at advantage over them. For I was already sword in hand and with my back to the platform. In face of my flashing steel and determined look, they paused for a moment.

With a low, circling sweep of my blade, grating its point on the floor, I defied them all in right dramatic gesture.

Then, as they gathered for a rush and their swords swished out of the scabbards like a succession of whip-lashes, I leaped forward as if to charge them. In almost the same movement I wheeled, vaulted onto the stage, and plunged behind the curtain, leaving the sword to trip up the first who should follow me.

I fear lest, in my lack of skill with the pen, I have made this scene seem as though its enactment occupied great space of time. It was not so. I do not believe thirty seconds elapsed from the moment the watch fell to that when I disappeared behind the curtain.

I found myself on a stage set for the farce's first act. I shouldered my way through the awkwardly-posed actors, and off at the right upper entrance.

I was running for my life; yet I was not minded to fly in blind panic into some corner, there to be taken like a hare. So into the first dressing-room I charged and flung myself into a chair before the candle-lit table.

Scarce half a minute behind me trooped the hue and cry. One man—it was the fat fellow in the peachblow-coat—stuck his head in at the door; then withdrew in bashful chagrin.

For, at the dressing-table, clad in skirt and shawl, an actress was curling her yellow hair by means of a pair of crimping-tongs. Her back was to the door; but she caught sight of the peachblow gentleman in the mirror and squawked aloud, right prudishly, burying her face in her hands and screaming:

"Go *away!* Oh, *prithee* be gone, wretch!"

"Nothing in there but an old actress hag crimping her hair!" was the ungallant report bellowed by the peachblow fellow to his mates, as they trooped past and out into the rear alleyway leading to Walnut Street.

Whereat the "actress hag" breathed a mighty sigh of relief, kicked off the skirt, tossed aside the shawl, and dropped the cold crimping-tongs.

It had been "touch-and-go." And luck, having betrayed me in the matter of the dropped watch, at last stood my friend.

I sped on into the other dressing-rooms, taking rapidly what garments and grease paint I needed, and leaving in exchange such portions of my court suit as were necessary for me to shed.

A few minutes later a highly respectable man of middle age, habited as an upper servant, passed down the alley to Walnut Street, standing respectfully aside to make way for some of the returning gallants. The man's shoulders were thickened almost in a hump by reason of two severed Quaker coat-tails—buckram-lined.

At first, as I made my way to the heart of the city, I was tempted to chuckle over my own cleverness; or, rather, at the stupidity of my pursuers.

I had accomplished my business in Philadelphia. In the buckram of my coat-skirts were maps and specifications that would mean much to Washington in his planned attack on Philadelphia in the spring. I had, moreover, been able to alter Tarleton's report to such an extent that Howe would regard an assault on Valley Forge as little short of suicidal. I had entered the lion's den—and escaped.

Yet, ever in my self-gratulation and smug conceit, would arise the memory of two great dark eyes. At such times my grin would fade and a queer lump came into my throat.

I wished I had never seen Miriam Dacre. Doubly I wished I had never deceived her into thinking me other than I was. Before honest eyes like hers the most needful deceptions seemed criminal.

I steeled my heart to forget her. Why not? What I had done, had to be done. And, after all, I should never see her again. Why let her eyes haunt me?

Another more practical thought tended to sober my first glee. Truly, for the instant I was moderately safe. The police and the soldiery were, no doubt, scouring the city for a tall young man in periwig and white court suit. None would cast a second glance at a slightly deformed, liveried servant of middle age and middle height.

But day would soon dawn. And, under the glare of sunlight or even of fairly strong daylight, my grease paint and penciled facial lines would betray me at first glance.

The city was ill lit, and by the dim street-lights my disguise was perfect. But it is only in the stage plays that false hair, beard or grease paint deceives anybody by day.

No, I had not won release. Nothing but a temporary respite from the chase. What I was to do must be done quickly, unless I wished to have a hempen halter about my neck within another twenty-four hours. Plan after plan flashed through my mind, only to be rejected as fast as presented.

By this time a double guard would be at every exit from the city. No one would be allowed to depart without a pass, or else a careful search. The same rule would, no doubt, obtain for days to come. Meanwhile, every nook and cranny and hiding-place in all Philadelphia would be scoured by the provost marshal's men.

In that Tory city there were few enough safe hiding-places for a patriot.

I do not mean that there were not hundreds of brave, loyal, patriotic families there—families ready to risk all for the cause. But they were all known to the authorities, and were constantly under suspicion. Their houses would be the first to be ransacked for spies.

By going to them for refuge I should not only incur discovery, but bring down imprisonment and other troubles upon those who harbored me.

I made my way through the darkness to a water-front hovel I knew of, and threw myself down upon a pile of sacks. There I slept for three full hours, awakening at the first breath of dawn.

I washed the grease paint from my face, arranged my hair in a cue and powdered it with a puff I had found in one of the dressing-rooms. Thus attired, I was as like as not to pass muster as a footman or other house servant.

I must take chances on not meeting any one who had seen me at last night's revels. The neat livery and powdered hair gave me a look of intense respectability, which the smug expression of my face emphasized.

True, few footmen were so tanned of cheek as I. But that was a mere detail. The "thickening" on my shoulders, caused by the stolen coat-skirts, also tended to change my figure and to diminish my apparent height.

None the less, there was nowhere I could go. I dared not leave the city, knowing full well I would be stopped at the first outpost. I could not lurk in any hiding-place, for those would all be closely searched.

I could not go to the tavern or lodging-house, for I had not a penny in my pocket. Nor, by the way, had I eaten in eighteen hours.

No, all that remained was to walk the streets, keeping out of notice as long as possible, and soon or late be caught. I would have taken my chances more blithely could I have managed to get those "buckram" reports of mine to Washington.

I do not believe in running into Fate. But, as Fate is popularly supposed to be a lady, it is but etiquette to meet her half-way. So, instead of skulking through back streets until I should be starved into prison, I resolved to set forth from the city.

I could, at least, go as far as the first picket-line. Then, if I was turned back, I could try another road, and yet another, on the bare chance of finding one that was inadequately guarded.

None could know better than I how hopeless a plan was this. But, at all events, I would be *moving*. And even the most futile efforts seemed better just then than inaction.

Off I set to the westward, through the gray dawn, shivering with the bitter cold of early morning.

Past the heart of the town, past the straggling outskirts, I plodded. At length I was in the west highway; and, as I knew, the first outpost of guards lay a bare half mile ahead, just beyond a curve in the road.

I was faint with hunger and dejection. But for my despatches, I would almost have bartered freedom for a square meal. Few folk were yet astir, though now and then a market-cart or a greatcoated day laborer would pass me.

The road was narrow and ill made, scored with many a rut and banked high with snow. Walking was hard at best. As I stumbled on, the rattle and rumble of a heavy traveling-coach coming up behind me broke on my ears; then a resounding thump and a woman's little cry of consternation.

I looked back. Perhaps fifty yards to the rear the carriage had halted. It had stopped for the best of reasons. The left front wheel had rolled off.

The horses, luckily, stood like sheep. The coachman had been pitched from his box, and was floundering profanely out of a drift—unhurt.

The vehicle had been going, perforce, at snail's pace, so no great harm had befallen. This much I saw as I ran up.

"Not hurt, madam, are you?" the footman was asking as he scrambled from the snow by the coachman's side and hurried to the coach-window.

"No," answered a voice that halted me in my tracks, "I think not. What has happened?"

"We've lost a wheel. Grimes"—indicating the snow-plastered coachman—"is trying to fix it. Sorry you should have had the shock, madam."

The coachman looked up with a grunt from his inspection. In one hand he held the wheel, in the other an iron nut that had lain near by.

"It's those drunken stable-boys," I heard him say to the footman. "They forgot to screw the nut tight, and the wheel just slipped off. Lucky we were going slow. No damage. The axle isn't even bent. We can get it all shipshape in five minutes. Look lively with the wrench and the wheel while I lift the axle. Here, you," he hailed me, "lend a hand lifting the coach corner with me, my lad."

I had stood inert, my eyes fixed in dumb misery on the half-opened coach-window whence that voice had issued. To save my neck, I could not have mustered courage or sense to hurry on. Now, at the coachman's hail, I shuffled forward toward the beckoning man.

"Now, then," he commanded, "get hold of it here—no, farther up the axle—and when I give the word, we'll heave together. Be ready with the wheel, Bates. Now, all—"

"Wait!" called the girl, overhearing. "It will be lighter for you if I get out."

Out into the road she stepped. I don't know whether it was heroism or cowardice that made me bend to my place at the axle, with my head bowed on my chest, before she could see my face. The coachman gave the word,

and by a mighty effort we lifted the awkward coach-body until the footman could fit the wheel into its place.

"Now, the wrench," ordered the coachman, "and I'll have everything right in two minutes. That'll do for you," he went on, turning from the footman to me. "Much obliged. And here's sixpence for your trouble. You've got a lot of strength in those humped shoulders of yours."

I moved away without answering, and set off at a fast walk in the direction whence the accident had turned me. For I had gained enough self-control during the moment's hard work to enable me to tear myself free from the crazy yearning to look once more into Miriam Dacre's eyes.

I made haste to leave the coach, meaning to put all the distance possible between the girl and myself. Mastered by this wise resolve, I lifted my gaze from the ground when I had traversed a few yards of the road.

I raised my eyes, I say—and found myself staring full at Miriam Dacre. She stood not six feet away from me, barring my path.

CHAPTER VIII.

I FIND STRANGE RESCUE.

YES, there in the snowy, uneven trail, straight in front of me, she stood. The road had seemed to lead to despair—to capture—to death. And now, between me and all that horror, stood Miriam Dacre!

She was looking at me fixedly. I thought I read wonder—and sadness, too—in her dark eyes. And she was paler than she had been last night. Paler, and with a look of weariness she had not then worn—a look that went to my heart.

She was dressed in some close-fitting maroon stuff that set off the slenderness of her tiny figure. I felt like some hideous giant of olden fairy tale as I towered dumbly above her.

It was she who spoke first. It is always the woman, I think, who speaks first in moments of stress.

"Why are you here?" she asked.

I could not for the instant frame a reply, but stood, awkward and miserable, seeking to draw away my bloodshot eyes from the quick, imperious scrutiny of her gaze.

"Why are you here?" she repeated. "And—like *this?* I knew you, at one glance, even though you sought to hide your face. I did not wish—for your sake—to speak to you in my servants' hearing. I knew you would hasten away. So I came out of ear-shot of them to wait for you."

"But why?" I asked wretchedly. "What is there you can say to me, beyond giving me my just dues as an impostor who tricked you into granting me an hour of sunshine? And you can say nothing on that score which will make me more miserable than I already am. So, why have you stopped me?"

"You are unhappy," she said, not answering my heartbroken query, but ever reading me with those great, honest eyes of hers. "I read trouble in your face last night. To-day, I read despair. Why?"

Again I made no reply. What could I say? Her look shifted for a moment from my face to my clothing. And again her gaze was perplexed.

"Last night," she said, "you were clad as a gallant, and had the manner of the court. To-day you are in livery, and are stripped of manner. Which rôle—if either—is your *own?* Perhaps I have no right to ask. But—"

"You have every right that you may choose to take," I blurted out. "As to whether I am a footman or a courtier, the answer is simple. I am neither. Though nearer the former than the latter. But why should you ask? You were at the Mischianza. The place was in an uproar over me. Surely you heard the story from a hundred tongues. There is scant mystery over it. You must know who I am and what I am. Why make me retell what you know?"

"I know nothing," she made answer. "You are speaking in riddles. Last night I had a blow. A blow that stung my pride, my self-respect. The man to whom I was talking intimately, as to a dear cousin, suddenly proved to be a stranger who, for reasons of his own, had chosen to make sport of me by assuming the character of another.

I could not trust myself to speak. So I left you. And the gaiety of the whole place jarred upon me. So I called for my coach, and was driven directly home. What happened at the Mischianza after you and I parted, I know not. For I did not remain there five minutes longer."

I breathed more freely. She was unaware, then, of my exposure as a Yankee spy—of my undignified flight and the search even now being made for me. Soon she must hear. But, for the moment—

"I am to spend a week with my aunt in Germantown," she went on, "so I made an early start this morning. But for the accident to my carriage I might well have passed you in the road without recognition. I am glad I did not. Tell me, sir, do you not think you owe me an explanation — an apology for what—"

"No," I retorted harshly. "No explanation could explain; no apology atone. I forced myself into your presence last night and played the buffoon, trampling beneath my feet every vestige of chivalry. I led you to believe me Fred Dacre. I even compromised your own name. For I am a fugitive from justice. Is there any 'apology' that can wipe out such an act?"

But she, as is the way with her thrice-blessed sex, shifted from prosecutor to counsel for the defense at the bitter self-arraignment in my words.

"A fugitive from justice?" she repeated in amaze. "You were in flight, then, when you entered our coach? You assumed the personality of my cousin, and stayed at my side in order to shield yourself from peril?"

"Yes," I sneered. "I hid behind a woman's skirts for safety."

"Don't," she begged; "you shall not speak so! You were not to blame. It is I who have wronged you. While I have been blaming you as a heartless, practical joker, you were really in danger—forced to act a part, perhaps, in the very shadow of death! To smile and jest with me, and to keep up the ruse, when every moment you might be seized by your pursuers. There is courage, not cowardice, in that."

"You are wrong." I had the grace to declare. "No *man* would deal so gently with my fault. In your divine pity, you spare where you should—"

"And the dress you now wear," she broke in with excitement. "The livery —the thickened shoulders—is that, also, a disguise to throw off pursuit?"

I nodded, adding, with a mirthless laugh:

"And a poor device at that. Half a mile beyond is the West Road guard-house. I shall be halted there. If I am not arrested, I shall at least be turned back. And then—"

"But why? Oh, I see! You have no pass. Is that it?"

"Yes. I—"

"I have it!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "I have the very idea. Look!"

She drew from her belt a paper and thrust it into my hand. I opened it and glanced dully over the few official lines.

It was a military pass permitting "The Honorable Miriam Dacre, with coachman and footman," to leave or enter Philadelphia at pleasure. It meant little to me, and I handed it back.

"Don't you see?" she cried with sweet impatience. "I shall send Bates —my footman, you know—back to Philadelphia. You are in footman's livery. You shall take Bates's place on the box beside Grimes. Then, when you are safely beyond the lines, you can get down and go your way in safety. The pass includes 'coachman and footman.' It is a perfectly feasible plan."

I stared at her, agape—scarce able to take in her wonderful meaning.

"You do this—" I muttered; "you do this—for *me?*"

"Come," she commanded. "The carriage break-down is mended, and the two servants are looking at us as though we were chimeras. But I know I can trust them both. They have served me long. Let us go back to the carriage now and—"

"You do this for *me?*" I said again in stupid wonder. "For a man whose very name you do not even know? For a man who, for all you can tell, may be a thief, a forger, a common felon?"

"You are none of those things," she said with quiet conviction. "I told you

last night that I pride myself on being able to read faces. I read misery, pain, recklessness, even wild gaiety, in yours. But no crime, nor trace of baseness. You are an honest man, whatever your misfortunes. If you have come within the scourge of the law, it is for misfortune, not for crime. That is why I offer you my aid.

"For that and—and because—oh, *why* can't I be truthful even to myself? It *isn't* for that reason I help you. And I don't know *why* I do. I know I should not do as much for any man in distress whom I chanced to meet. There is something about *you*—there was something about you from the first — that affects me as I never before was affected by any one. I don't know what it is. But I could not even hate you last night, though I tried to—oh, so hard! And to-day, I knew you before I saw your face. *Why* do I talk this way," she ended with a helpless gesture, "and why do I *feel* this way?"

I was tongue-tied. The utter innocence of the speech was as childlike as her own stature. Not a hint of coquetry, of love, of any kindred sentiment. Merely faint trouble over an emotion which she could not understand.

And, in the face of such marvelous simplicity, I felt as though in the presence of something holy.

Scarce knowing what I did, I dropped to one knee, there in the snowy road, and kissed the little hand that had been unconsciously outstretched toward me.

Then I rose, and again our eyes met. This time in a long, wordless, fathomless look that sent the hot blood surging to my head, while it left her own dainty, high-bred face deadly pale.

With a quick sigh, as of one suddenly awakened, she turned and walked back to the carriage; I following her, moving as one in a dream.

When she addressed the wondering servants, her sweet voice was level and devoid of tremor.

"Bates," she said, "you will go back to Miss Dows's, and ask her if I left my serpent bracelet on her dressing-table there last night after dinner. Ask for another pass at the provost-marshal's, and come directly on to Germantown. Grimes, this man will take Bates's place on the box. Drive as rapidly as you can, to make up for the time we have lost."

Without another word, or a look in my direction, she stepped into the coach before I could spring forward to help her. I climbed onto the box, beside the gaping Grimes, and we set off.

At the guard-house we were halted. A stout captain rode to the coach-door. At sight of Miriam, he rolled out of the saddle with all speed, and bowed before her with an air of exaggerated gallantry.

In a trice I had recognized him as the man in the peachblow coat who had so hotly pursued me in my flight from the Mischianza. I turned my head the other way and became absorbed in the scenery.

Meantime, amid many florid compliments, he was glancing carelessly over the proffered pass.

"Miss Dacre, coachman and footman," he repeated absent-mindedly, handing it back. "Quite so. You see, Miss Dacre, we have to be doubly careful this morning. Every pass must be closely scanned, and persons who are unknown to the officer of the guard must be detained. Fortunate, is it not, that I have the delight of knowing you? But any officer in the whole city knows you by sight, and would die for the chance of even so brief a word with you as this. This morning, when I was detailed to the West Road post, I cursed my luck. But now I see it was my red-letter day. I scarce looked for such a joyous break in this morning's police duty. So I thank my stars that—"

"Police duty?" said she. "I fear I don't understand. Since when have his majesty's officers been detailed as constables? Is it a new general order?"

"No," he answered; "but, you see, I saw the fellow last night, and the general sent me here because I'd be likely to recognize him again, even if he was in disguise. This is the road, of course, he'll be most likely to take. Egad! If you could have seen poor Harvey Digby's face. 'Twas as good as a stage play."

"Sir Harvey Digby?" she repeated. "What is amiss with him?"

"Good saints!" ejaculated the cap-

tain. "It can't be you haven't heard! The whole town's agog over it. Rare doings, I do assure you! Why, last night, at the Mischianza, whom should we unmask but a—"

The whip lay idle in Grimes's half-raised hand. As if by accident, I lost my balance on the box and convulsively seized his arm. The whip came down with a swish across the horses' backs.

The surprised brutes leaped forward under the sting of the lash. The fat captain, who had been standing with one booted foot negligently poised on the steps of the carriage, tumbled backward on the frozen ground, barely missing the flying wheels. We had dashed on for a full hundred yards before Grimes could pull in his terrified steeds.

"Now, see what you did, gawk!" he growled furiously at me. "Near made 'em run away, and upset a British officer, and I make no doubt half scared poor Miss Dacre to death. You won't hold your job of footman very long, I can tell you, unless you learn to sit a box more graceful than that."

I muttered something that passed for an excuse, and ventured a backward look to where the fat captain, still seated in the middle of the road, was glaring after us in speechless wrath.

One obstacle was overcome. But I had passed the stage where I dared hope for any continued good fortune.

CHAPTER IX.

INTO THE DARKNESS.

We drove along for perhaps two miles at a rattling rate—as fast as our horses could comfortably travel over those frozen, lumpy roads. The last picket of the cordon drawn about Philadelphia was left far behind. I had succeeded in breaking out of the city. I ought to have been very happy. I was not.

Since his rebuke at my life-saving awkwardness, the coachman had not spoken. Nor had I. Neither had Miriam Dacre given sign of her presence. Now, however, we came to the fork of the roads. Mine led westward to Valley Forge; hers northward to Germantown. It was a veritable "parting of the ways," and my heart was leaden as I said to Grimes:

"Stop! I get down here."

He looked his astonishment at my peremptory tone; but, after the manner of the English serving class of those times, he instinctively obeyed an order couched in a voice of command. Before he could change his mind, I had slipped to the ground.

I walked to the carriage-door, opened it, and stood bareheaded before the girl who sat within.

"Our roads part here, Miss Dacre," said I. "I will not try to thank you. I cannot. You have saved my life—which I have been wont to value lightly. You have saved something more," with an unconscious shrug of the shoulders whose bulk was thickened by my buckram reports—"something that may change history. For that there are no words worthy to thank you. I—"

"You are *going?*" she interrupted, and there was a note of regret in her dear voice that stirred me. "Surely it is not yet needful? Now that we are so far past the picket-lines, would it not be safe for you to ride inside here with me? I hoped—"

"I would ride blithely to the gibbet, if I might do so at your side," I blurted out awkwardly. "But I should deserve the gibbet, and worse, if I so intruded on your kindness. You have stooped to the mire to lift into life a man who is unworthy to kiss the hem of your dress. It is enough. I can burden you no further. I shall carry into the darkness with me a memory dearer than my own soul. Help me not to mar the blessed memory by saying what I have no right to say. I shall never see you again. And the best I can hope from you is forgetfulness. But, oh, *I* can never forget! I would to Heaven I could!"

I ceased my ardent, blundering speech. For a moment she did not speak. But it cut me to the quick to see tears in the great dark eyes that never left mine. Then she said, with a pitiful effort at lightness, more pathetic than weeping:

"I am a woman, and women are of nature inquisitive. It must be that we are. For the philosophers of the ages—who, of course, were men—have ever said so. I have not asked why you fled the law. I have not asked why you lashed the horses into a run just as Captain Crow-

ther was on the point of telling me who you are. I have asked nothing—not even your name. But—I am mortal curious!"

For one brief instant I was sore tempted to tell her all—to confess that I was a spy, and that in rescuing me she had unknowingly struck a blow at the England she loved.

But how could I? I was not my own master. My life was my country's—not my own. My secrets were not mine for the telling.

She would, moreover, learn everything soon enough. The story had spread like wildfire. The first friend she met would tell it to her; even as that fat captain we had so abruptly left had started to do. And, for once, duty and inclination were of one mind.

How could I bear the shame and horror in this loyal English girl's face when she should hear that she had succored a foe of her country? I could not tell her.

Yet—in spite of duty and inclination—something within me craved to turn to this wondrous maiden for sympathy; to tell her of my miserable, repressed childhood, my years of poverty and wandering, my soldierly career, and my patriotic reasons for becoming a spy. It was a maudlin impulse, unworthy of a grown man.

But, before you sneer at me, remember that I was half starved, that my nerves were raw, and—most of all—that it was glorious Miriam Dacre who had asked me for my confidence, whose eyes were even now beseeching me.

"I will tell you what little I can," I made shift to reply, "but the chief question I cannot answer—both because I dare not and because I have not the right. If it will be any consolation, I can assure you that you will hear all about me from a dozen tongues before the day is out—and in far more eloquent, elaborate, exciting language than I could master. You wish to know who I am? I can answer that—in part."

Her eyes, which had clouded with disappointment, cleared, and she smiled an invitation to me to speak.

"I am called Ralph Dale," I began, then paused as I saw her lips silently framing the "Ralph Dale" over and over, as though to determine whether or not it pleased her.

She smiled again, and for some absurd reason I was happy in the knowledge that she liked my poor name.

"I am a Jerseyman," I went on. "I come from Pompton, and—"

"Pompton?" she repeated, puzzled. "I know of no such place on the Isle of Jersey. Is it—"

"I am speaking of the Colony of New Jersey," I corrected, "where I was born. You see, I—"

"You are American, then? I should have thought from your voice and manner—"

"My voice and manner," I answered, "are neither of America nor of England, but of stageland."

"I don't understand."

"I mean," I went on, "I am an actor."

"An actor?" she exclaimed, incredulous. "You are—"

"Yes," I laughed bitterly, "a professional vagabond; a cheap play-actor; a disreputable mouther of wiser men's words; a fellow who mimics great deeds he has not the wit nor the manhood to perform—such a one as would seek to play the gentleman in order to bask in your smiles for one short hour at the Mischianza, and then would enact the whining suppliant to cajole you into smuggling him from a city whence most likely he is wanted by the police for no nobler crime than non-payment of his board-bill. That is I—Ralph Dale!"

"Why will you hurt me by speaking so brutally?" she pleaded. "It is cruel, unjust. I—"

"I but echoed the popular idea concerning us stage folk," I answered. "And what am I, to claim exception to the rule? Look! Even now I am repaying your mercy by sneers. Would a *gentleman* do that? Forgive me! My heart is sore with the rôle I have had to enact before you, and it finds vent for its pain in savageness. For I would rather appear well in your eyes than in those of all the world. I am insane to talk like this. I came to say farewell. Let it be said while I have the strength to remember that I am at least a man, and that you are—an angel of pity. Good-by, and, oh, God bless you—God bless you always!"

The first level ray of the rising sun

struck athwart her troubled, lovely face. It was but a momentary glance at its beauty that I permitted myself. Then, before she could speak, I had wheeled about and was off.

I heard her sweet voice calling after me, first in gentle imperiousness, then in an appeal that wrung my heart. But, with all the courage I could summon up, I pressed onward, turning neither to right nor to left, forcing back from my brain the traitorous longing that bade me turn about, fling myself at her feet, and tell her everything—yes, *everything,* even that I loved her with my whole being.

For now I knew. I knew I loved her with heart and soul and strength. I knew, too, that I could never hope to see her again, and that, even if I should, a great lady like Miriam Dacre could have no lot nor part with the poor provincial actor who had turned spy, and who was her beloved country's enemy.

I had won freedom, but I had lost what was a thousandfold more precious. And, with leaden feet, I set my face westward, where duty and patriotism beckoned.

Love was dead; only war remained.

CHAPTER X.

DARK DAYS.

Snow everywhere.

Wastes of white, rolling land, broken by black skeletons of trees and by jagged gray rocks. A stray crow or two drifting across the leaden sky. Over and through all a horrible cold, whose icy breath bit to the very bones.

A scattering bevy of "dug-out" hovels, tumble-down huts, a dilapidated cottage or two, a frozen, foot-beaten parade-field. In the center of all, a squat farmhouse.

In other words, Valley Forge!

I have not the wit to write clever description. And more facile pens than mine have halted aghast at the task of describing that scene. Yet my story needs such description, if only in a few words.

Yes, and you who read need it, too. For in this village of a thousand miseries was cradled the seemingly dead seed that was one day to give you your liberties.

So — awkwardly enough, I doubt — I will tell in a sentence or two the sight that met my eyes early one bitter January morning as I crawled out of my tattered blankets and stood in my hut-door, trying to munch the frozen potato and bit of moldy biscuit that formed my breakfast.

About the encampment shambled a number of creatures whose aspect and "make-up" would have won them a fortune on the theater stage. But never in playhouse force were seen such scarecrows.

A few wore what was left of ragged, faded uniforms. Still fewer had boots of any sort. The majority were swaddled in such nondescript rags as they had been able to find.

Their feet were either bare or swathed in strips of dirty cloth. At nearly every step the sharp, frozen earth and the rocky soil cut through such meager protection as was thus afforded. And a man was easy to trace by the blood-prints of his feet upon the snow.

Fires flickered feebly here and there; and around each of these a shivering, gaunt crew of tatterdemalions were crouched. But when the mercury is twenty degrees below zero there is slight enough comfort to be won from an open-air bonfire.

Scarce a man but was worn to skin and bone. Hollow eyes peered out from gray, sunken faces. Bodies that once had been stout and hale now trembled from cold and starvation, as if from an ague.

Many had had to sleep out of doors, most of them without blankets—most of the huts and practically all the pitiful store of quilts and warm clothing being reserved for the sick.

The sick? Few were anything else. Yet the camp hospitals contained none but those who could not actually keep on their feet.

Food was scarce. Comforts were unknown. And the bitter part of it all was that the fault lay less with our poverty than with the incompetence of the cheap politicians whom Congress had put in charge of the commissariat.

All over the Colonies food and clothes were constantly being collected and sent to the starving heroes at Valley Forge.

But, through commissary negligence and greed, the better part of these generous supplies miscarried, and we were left to suffer as we would.

If you doubt the truth of what I have here set down, I refer you to any history of that fearful winter.

Over on the parade-ground, big Baron Steuben, in a woolly dressing-gown, was bellowing orders to the regiment he was drilling. That phlegmatic old German was the most tireless drillmaster I ever knew. Not an hour of any day, fair or stormy, but he would have the weary, weakened skeletons out on that field and put them through their staggering, limping maneuvers.

The men grumbled fiercely at this seemingly needless addition to their ills. But the splendid result was seen when, later in the year, they took the field as a perfectly disciplined corps of soldiers instead of as a rabble of gawky recruits.

From hut to hut a cloaked woman moved, followed by a negro servant, who lugged a hamper of food and liquors. I recognized her, even at that distance, as Lady Washington on her daily round of visits to the sick. The puffed gray hair, under its quilted hood, framed a face that every sick soldier in camp had grown to look for and to worship.

A company, relieved from drill duty, had broken rank, and now hobbled back to their quarters, passing close to my hut and laughing over some jest with a gaiety worthy of well-fed civilians.

I looked at the men, an unwonted moisture in my eyes. Their brave jollity amid such surroundings was to me more pathetic than tears could have been.

Remember, you who are sons or grandsons of the Valley Forge veterans—these were not like the regular troops of some established government, forced to serve against their will and bound by death penalties against desertion. The Valley Forge sufferers were held in that starvation camp by no stronger bond than love of their country.

Any one of them could easily have sneaked away by night and gone to his own home; there to have warmth, food, and clothes for the asking. We had no established government, no adequate means for punishing deserters. Every man who froze and starved at Valley Forge that winter did so of his own free will, without even the assurance of a penny's worth of reward. All for sheer patriotism.

They were heroes. Were they not, also, almost as truly martyrs as, in the olden days, were Nero's own victims?

So much for Valley Forge and its horrors. I find I have written more of it all than I had intended. But the memory brings back the old scenes with sickening distinctness, and therefore I have rambled on.

Nor is it the worse for you good Americans to have read once again how your ancestors suffered that you might be free.

And now, back to the story:

I left my hut and was crossing the camp to the squat farmhouse where Washington held his headquarters, when of a sudden there arose the sound of scattered cheering from the southern end of our encampment.

Into the parade-ground — sorely upsetting Steuben's drill — floundered a mixed drove of cattle—sheep and pigs—all squealing or bellowing as they were pricked forward by a band of wild-looking men mounted on lean, scraggy horses.

At the head of the queer, straggling procession rode a man dressed as for a ball. He laughed gaily down into the eager faces of the troops that crowded about him, and waved his hat as a scarecrow on crutches raised the cry:

"Three cheers for General Wayne and his riders!"

The cheers were given with a lusty good will. Then, as they died down, another voice yelled:

"Mad Anthony forever!"

A roar of laughter followed this affectionate use of Wayne's nickname. And the general, clapping spurs to his tired horse, cantered across to headquarters to make his report.

I hurried on as fast as I could, in the hope of hearing part of it.

It was Wayne who kept us from utter starvation that winter. With his daring "riders," he scoured the countryside, and would swoop down on cattle, provision-barns, etc., under the very noses of the British, bearing away the enemies' supplies for the Valley Forge army.

His luck was as great as his daring.

No other man save Washington himself could command such love and admiration from the troops. He had a dozen nicknames — "Mad Anthony," "Blacksnake," and "Dandy Wayne." The man was never seen in any but a costume worthy to be worn at court. He went into the battle clad as if for a banquet.

Wayne reached the farmhouse several minutes ahead of me, and his report was delivered before my arrival. As I entered the big, low-ceiled living-room, he was standing with his back to a roaring wood fire, drinking hot coffee from a tin dipper, and pausing to snatch a word or two with some of the dozen or more occupants of the apartment.

At his left, smoking a long church-warden pipe, lounged doughty Major Morton, of Virginia—"Old Solid Column," as he was even then called, although he was scarce more than twenty. To his right loomed up a portly giant, who looked more like a farmer than a soldier—General Nathanael Greene.

Just beyond him, writing at a rude desk, sat a slender, red-haired youth—Colonel Alexander Hamilton, secretary to the commander-in-chief.

Another lad, still younger, reclined in a window-seat, poring over a French romance. I had met him but once, when he returned to Valley Forge from Albany.

But he was known to every soldier as the Marquis de Lafayette, the French patriot who had left court and estates to cast in his lot with the Colonists.

In the great chair by the center-table, glancing at a sheaf of maps spread out before him, sat the chief. How shall I describe Washington? Often my children have begged me to. Yet I cannot. Tall, broad, dignified—no, that is not the vital idea. I can't do it.

He was a *man!* A man such as Providence meant man to be.

In his faded buff-and-blue Continental fatigue uniform he presented a figure that would at a glance have drawn attention amid a whole roomful of any Old-World monarchs I have ever seen. And yet he could unbend—not only to mirth, but to wrath as well—as more than one of us knew to our cost.

There was no formal conference afoot. The big room for the time was more an officers' club than aught else. Ceremony was not enforced. Yet, somehow, none of us could ever be wholly free from ceremony in the chief's presence.

Lafayette looked up from his book as I came in. I had met him a year before, and until now had not seen him since his recent return to Valley Forge. Yet he remembered me.

Springing to his feet, the lad came forward with outstretched hand and smiling a welcome in that peculiarly winning style which was his birthright.

"Major Dale," he cried with his strong French accent. "You recall me? De Lafayette. I ask the honor of congratulating you on your promotion to major's rank, and far more upon the gallant feats in Philadelphia which caused it. Your adventures there were like a stage-play. *Ma foi!* I would have given a year of my life to be in such a series of escapades—and ten years of it to be safely out of them again.

"They say when you came in here with your tale of tampering with Howe's reports and with your own despatches bound in two gray coat-skirts, General Washington laughed aloud for the first time this winter. When do you go on your next secret-service venture?"

"Never, I hope," was my fervent answer. "It is good to wear a sword at one's side again, and to be able to look the world in the face with no fear of hangman's noose. Even one meal a day and a fair prospect of starving or of being shot by the British in some skirmish is a delight after my weeks in Philadelphia. I have had a full month of freedom since then, and I still revel in my liberty. I trust my next blow may be struck on the battle-field. Was there much of interest in General Wayne's report? Or was it private?"

"It told only of the usual raid on British forage-wagons and of a brush with some dragoons. And he brought back a batch of Philadelphia newspapers captured from the dragoons' luggage. General Washington divided them up among four of us for reading. I got two, but your English language makes stiff perusal for my Gallic brain. Nor does Philadelphia news greatly interest me. Would you care to look at them? Pass them on to Morton when you have read them."

I was, as a rule, little more interested in reading the government-censored Philadelphia papers than was Lafayette. But I knew the society columns were certain to contain, at least, a mention of the movements of so great a local celebrity as Miriam Dacre.

So I accepted the proffered sheets with gratitude, and carried them to an unoccupied corner of the room. There I glanced idly over the first page.

The paper was five days old. Its columns were devoted largely to British government orders, lying rumors that the revolutionary cause was about to be abandoned, stale news from London, and items of social interest. Through these last my eyes ran eagerly. But, to my disgust, not one word could I find anent Miriam Dacre.

I turned the page, scanned the head-lines carelessly, and — all at once my wandering faculties were focused to their highest keenness. Beneath this head-line, "Arrested for Aiding a Rebel Spy!" I read:

All British and loyal American society here is agog with amaze at a most frightful scandal in high life, involving the arrest of no less a personage than the Hon. Miriam Dacre.

This city was recently treated to the spectacle of a Yankee spy forcing his presence upon the exclusive Mischianza. This same spy, Ralph Dale by name, is believed to have discovered there, and elsewhere in Philadelphia, important army secrets. He pierced the close cordon of guards and carried his tidings in safety to the arch rebel, Washington.

How he managed to enter the Mischianza, and, more especially, his means for eluding the guard and escaping scatheless from the city, has been a profound mystery. It is so no longer. Thanks to the cleverness of General Sir William Howe's secret-service men, Dale's every move here has at last been traced. Here is the full and truthful account thereof:

Dale entered the Mischianza through the aid of a lady of high and renowned social fame. None other than the Hon. Miriam Dacre! The unfortunate damsel is believed to have been long acquainted with the spy, and to have cherished, during many months, an infatuation for him. Relying on this unfortunate attachment, Dale came to Philadelphia, where she at once began furnishing him with all the news she could pick up concerning the government's plans and resources.

She even consented to take him, disguised, to the Mischianza, where he hoped to ferret out more secrets for the rebels. There, thanks to the courage and address of Sir Harvey Digby, Bart., Dale was unmasked and was forced to flee for his life.

But the audacious spy managed to get word to his misguided benefactress, and told her to have a coach awaiting him just this side of the West Road guard-house at daybreak the following morning; also to procure passports for him to escape from the city in the dress of a footman.

The unhappy lady did so, and, under pretense of going to Germantown, conducted him in her carriage to the rebel lines, after which, with a generous gift of money, she parted from him and returned to her house on Chestnut Street.

The foregoing narrative seems well-nigh incredible. This paper would not dare to print the account did not the British authorities here vouch for its entire truth. The rebels are to be complimented on their spy's good fortune.

It may distress or flatter Master Dale to learn that Miss Dacre has to-day been arrested and imprisoned in the city guard-house, there to remain without bail until she comes up for trial at the February assizes on charge of wilfully aiding and abetting her country's enemies.

The penalty for this crime is death by hanging.

(To be continued.)

THE HOURS.

WHY talk of years and centuries and ages?
What mean such mighty scrolls of time to thee?
It is the hours that proffer thee their pages
Whereon to trace life's brief epitome!

Clarence Urmy.

HIS AFTER-DINNER SPEECH.

By LEE BERTRAND.

The awful predicament of a diffident man at a banquet where he had hoped to distinguish himself by the aid of a novel device.

JOE WILLET was certainly no orator. Three words were the most he could ever put together while on his feet confronting an audience, and even those three were a supremely painful and desperate effort.

He was quite a clever fellow in other directions, too. His work at the office was all that was to be desired, and when it came to outdoor sports, there were few young men to match him. His inability to make a speech was almost his only weak point — the only respect in which his nerve failed him.

He was by no means a coward—physically. He had served as a private in a volunteer regiment throughout the Spanish-American War, and had acquitted himself with credit. He was not afraid of bullets—he would much rather have faced a hundred mausers in the hands of his country's enemies than face an audience of one dozen people at a banquet.

Nobody realized his limitations as an orator more fully than did Joe himself. The very thought of having to "make a speech before a whole lot of grinning people" caused him to shudder and turn pale.

On one occasion he had tried to overcome this weakness. His old regiment was going to present its colonel with a silver loving-cup at the annual banquet, and Joe was asked to make the presentation speech.

Just why the boys should have selected him for this delicate task was hard to explain; but so it happened—and Joe consented.

He thought this would be a good opportunity to try to conquer his failing. He felt confident that he would not suffer from stage-fright on this occasion; for there would not be a man at the dinner with whom he was not on speaking terms, and surely, he reasoned, it must be just as easy to address his friends collectively as it was to address each of them individually.

But when the psychological moment arrived, and Joe found himself on his feet with the huge silver loving-cup in his hand and smilingly expectant faces all around him, his tongue suddenly refused to do his bidding, his vocal chords became paralyzed, his wits deserted him, and he threw the cup across the table into the surprised colonel's lap and sat down without a word.

The company burst into loud laughter, which was increased when the colonel made a graceful speech of acceptance, in which he stated gravely that, much as he appreciated the gift, he "appreciated still more the kind and gracious words which accompanied it."

This anecdote has nothing to do with this story, except that it serves to illustrate what an utter failure Joe Willet was, as far as oratory was concerned.

After that sad experience Joe never again attempted to make a speech. He decided that eloquence had been left out of his make-up, and that it was no use for him to endeavor to acquire it.

His weakness did not worry him much. He told himself that he could get along in the world just as well without the ability to speak in public.

"After all," he reflected consolingly, "speech is silver, but silence is golden."

But this was before he met Miss Genevieve Carruthers. After she came into his life, he began to regret keenly that he did not possess the ability to sway crowds by his eloquence.

For Genevieve adored oratory almost as much as Joe Willet adored her. She came by her love of it quite naturally; for her father was a famous pulpit orator, her uncle was one of the most eloquent criminal lawyers, and her brother an actor who had acquired con-

siderable fame by his talented rendering of Shakespearian rôles.

One might suppose that there was enough speech-making in that family to render Genevieve sick and tired of it; but such was not the case.

Miss Carruthers was an enthusiast on the subject of eloquence. In her eyes a man who could win over a hostile assemblage by a speech was a greater hero than a man who led his regiment into the jaws of death. For a man who could not make a speech at all, she did not have much use.

Not knowing Joe Willet's limitations in this respect, she did not fail to impress these views upon him on several occasions. Joe was in despair.

She was a dainty, fluffy, clinging little thing, and Joe worshiped the ground on which she trod. After he had heard her views regarding oratory, he would rather have been Demosthenes than Napoleon Bonaparte, Alexander the Great and Crœsus all rolled into one.

One day Genevieve asked him to take her to the town hall to hear William Jennings Bryan make a speech. It was during a Presidential campaign, and the Democratic candidate was flooding the country with his soul-stirring eloquence.

They had seats near the platform; and as the great orator "orated," Genevieve sat entranced. Joe, who was constantly taking sidelong glances at her, saw how her eyes flashed and her bosom rose and fell with emotion, and, with a pang of jealousy, he inwardly registered a vow to vote a straight Republican ticket at the forthcoming election.

"Oh, wasn't he grand?" exclaimed Genevieve effusively, as they left the hall. "Wasn't he perfectly superb? I could have sat and listened to him forever. I think oratory is such a noble gift. Did *you* ever make a speech, Mr. Willet?"

"I'm afraid I haven't made very many," stammered the wretched young man evasively. "Won't you come and see me run in the Marathon race at the armory, next Thursday night, Miss Carruthers? The regiment is offering a gold medal as first prize, and I expect to win it."

"I'm sorry," was the reply, "but I already have an engagement for next Thursday. Mr. Sammis is going to make a political speech from the tail of a wagon on Main Street, and I have promised him that I will be there to listen to him."

Joe could not repress a scowl at this answer.

Fred Sammis was his rival. He was a red-haired, freckle-faced young man, who worked behind the silk counter of a local department-store, and the number of times he had to yell "Cash" during the day had developed his vocal powers to such an extent that he had become an orator, and devoted his spare time to making stump speeches for the political party he favored.

There wasn't anything particularly brilliant or original about Fred Sammis's speeches; but he had a loud and impressive delivery, and that made him a valuable man at outdoor meetings, for it enabled him to make himself heard above the din of trolley-cars and other street traffic.

Joe Willet and Sammis lodged at the same boarding-house. They had been on friendly terms until Genevieve Carruthers came home from school and into their lives.

Since that day, a coolness had gradually sprung up between them. They did not speak to each other when they met at the boarding-house table, and each would rather have starved than have asked the other to pass the butter.

Joe had feared for some time that Sammis would win in the contest for the hand of Genevieve. Now that the girl had declined his invitation to attend the Marathon race, he felt that there was no hope for him.

He won the race and the gold medal without any feeling of elation, and was walking home dejectedly from the armory when, without realizing what direction he was taking, he found himself walking down Main Street and past the wagon from which his rival was addressing a cheering crowd.

Sammis's arms were waving wildly, and he was bellowing like a mad bull.

"Fellow citizens," he shouted, "in the name of liberty—in the name of our glorious star-spangled banner — in the name of that noble bird of prey, the

great American eagle—I call upon you to rise and assert your rights! Down with the tr-r-rusts! Down with the oppressors of the peepul! Down with the tariff! Let us march to the polls with victory in our hearts and the battle-cry of freedom on our lips."

"Hooray!" shouted the crowd vociferously. "You're all right, young feller. Go ahead and throw it into 'em."

"Bravo!" cried a girl's voice which Joe Willet recognized.

In the thick of the crowd he espied Genevieve Carruthers, accompanied by her brother. She was clapping her little hands enthusiastically, and her eyes flashed with emotion.

At that sight Joe groaned and fled from the harrowing scene, a prey to the gloomiest thoughts.

"If only I could make a speech!" he sighed as he flung himself dejectedly on his bed. "Oh, why did Nature give me the ability to win Marathons and wrestling matches, and deprive me of the greatest accomplishment of all?"

A week later he received a letter from the Kenworth Social Club, of which he was a member. It read as follows:

DEAR SIR:

The annual banquet of the club will be held on Thursday evening, November 20, at the Hotel Burlington. Each member is privileged to bring one lady.

There will be speeches, of course, and you will be called upon to make one of them, the dinner committee having selected you for that purpose.

Kindly reply to this immediately, stating whether you intend to be present; whether you expect to be accompanied by a lady, and whether you will be prepared to make a speech when called upon.

Yours truly,
THE DINNER COMMITTEE.

Joe Willet was dumfounded. He had attended Kenworth banquets in the past, but never before had he been asked to make a speech. The club had many finished orators among its members. Why, then, had he been selected to speak? He could not understand it.

Suddenly he remembered that Fred Sammis, who was also a member of the Kenworth, was on the dinner committee.

The recollection brought a scowl to his features. He understood now what was behind that letter. It was some of his crafty rival's work, of course.

Sammis, knowing well that Joe could not make a speech, had fiendishly persuaded his fellow committeemen to select him for that honor.

The more Joe thought about this piece of spite, the angrier he grew. He told himself that this insult was not to be tolerated.

He thirsted for blood — Fred Sammis's blood. He made up his mind to give that young man the thrashing his impudence merited.

With this purpose in view, he strode fiercely out of his room and, without the formality of knocking on the door, entered the room of his rival, which was on the same floor.

Luckily for Sammis, he happened to be out just then. By the time he returned, Joe Willet had gone, having changed his mind about administering the thrashing. Another plan had occurred to him—a plan so daring that it quite took his breath away to think of it.

He had actually made up his mind to accept the committee's invitation to make a speech at that dinner. His fighting blood was aroused. Ignoring past failures and his chronic tendency toward stage-fright, he determined to try again.

Fred Sammis had had him included among the list of speakers with the rascally object of humiliating him. Sammis did not expect, of course, that he would dare to speak.

Well, Joe resolved to give his rival the surprise of his life. He would get up at that dinner and make a speech. That would be a better revenge than thrashing Sammis.

Nor was this all of Joe Willet's rash resolve. He had also made up his mind to invite Genevieve Carruthers to be his guest at the banquet.

Yes—he was going to stake everything on this daring undertaking. Genevieve should be there to witness either his oratorical triumph or his humiliating downfall.

With this purpose strong within him, he hurried to the home of Miss Carruthers. On his way there he was seized

with a terrible fear—perhaps Fred Sammis had anticipated him! Perhaps his rival had already extended an invitation to Genevieve.

Greatly to his joy, however, he found that in this instance he had stolen a march on Sammis. Genevieve had not yet been asked to the dinner, and she accepted his invitation with alacrity.

"I suppose there will be after-dinner speeches, Mr. Willet?" she inquired eagerly.

"Oh, yes," he answered; and added, quite nonchalantly: "I shouldn't be surprised if I said a few words myself."

That very day he sent his reply to the dinner committee.

"I take pleasure in stating," he wrote, "that I will attend the banquet; I will bring a lady with me, and I will be prepared to make a speech."

After he had mailed that letter, though, he began to have dire misgivings. A realization of the awful task he had imposed upon himself gradually dawned upon him.

In the heat of his indignation he had felt equal to the undertaking; but now a reaction set in, and his courage was beginning to ooze out of him.

"What have I done?" he asked himself many times. "Good Heavens! What have I done? How on earth am I going to make good—I, who can't say three words in public?"

A couple of days later his attention was attracted by the following advertisement in a morning newspaper:

> SPEECHES OF EVERY DESCRIPTION SUPPLIED.—After-dinner speeches, presentation speeches, sermons, funeral orations, political speeches, etc., etc., written to order by experts. If you want to make the hit of your life, let us write your speech for you. Drop in and talk it over with us. Strictest privacy assured.
> THE READY-MADE SPEECH COMPANY, ROOM 10, CASTLE BUILDING.

Joe Willet gasped as he read this advertisement.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "I didn't know there was any such company in existence. What a novel idea! It sounds pretty good, too. I'll pay them a visit right away."

In room 10 of the Castle Building he found a tall, distinguished-looking man seated at a roll-top desk, and a youth, who was industriously pounding at a typewriter.

"Good morning, sir," said the man pleasantly. "What can I do for you?"

"I saw your advertisement in the paper, and I have come here to find out if you can help me," explained Joe. "I am to be called on to make an after-dinner speech at a banquet of our club on November 20."

"Of course we can help you," replied the man cheerfully. "After-dinner speeches are our specialty. We supply some of the foremost post-prandial orators in the country. Now, how long a speech would you want, sir?"

"Oh, about fifteen minutes, I guess."

"Fifteen minutes—that's what I call a very sensible size. Would you prefer a humorous or a serious oration?"

"I—I don't know," stammered Joe. "I never gave that a thought. How would a little of each do?"

"I understand," assented the other. "A good, riproaring, earnest oration, with a dash of humor thrown in here and there. Isn't that the idea?"

Joe nodded.

"I guess that would answer the purpose. What are your terms?"

"Wait a minute, please, while I do some figuring," and the man seized a pencil and pad. "Now, let me see—we could let you have a fine ten-minutes' speech containing four anecdotes guaranteed brand-new, three puns never before used in this town, a verse of original poetry appropriate to the occasion, and a blood-stirring peroration, for fifteen dollars.

"Or we could let you have an extra fine ten-minute speech, containing six anecdotes, two side-splitting puns, seven humorous references to the personalities of those present at the dinner, and forty touching sentences guaranteed to bring tears to the eyes of man, woman, or child, for twenty dollars net.

"These are great bargains, I assure you. Usually our terms would be just double; but we are reducing the price just now in order to increase our number of clients. Shall I take your order, sir?"

"You say in your advertisement that

strictest privacy is assured. Do you really mean that?" asked Joe Willet cautiously.

"Certainly, sir. All our transactions are regarded by us as strictly confidential. Each speech is written especially for the occasion, and nobody except our client and ourselves ever knows that the speaker did not compose his oration himself.

"You can readily understand, sir, if you consider for a minute, that it would be greatly to our disadvantage to betray your confidence. Such a leak would ruin our business in very short order. You can thoroughly rely upon us to keep the matter a secret. Shall I take your order?"

"You prepare the speech in manuscript form, of course?" inquired Joe.

"Yes. Every word of the speech is written out just as it will be delivered. The manuscript even shows where the speaker should pause to wait for the bursts of applause. There are also full directions as to how to deliver the address—what elocutionary gestures should be used, etc. All our client has to do is to memorize the speech and rehearse it until he is letter-perfect."

"I see," said Joe. "It sounds pretty good. I guess I'll give you an order for the twenty-dollar speech."

"Very good, sir," rejoined the man at the roll-top desk, jotting down the order in a memorandum-book. "Will you kindly give me a little information as to your club, who will be at the dinner, the idiosyncrasies of some of the members, etc.? The speech will be so much better, of course, if we are supplied with such facts."

Joe gave him the desired information, and the man took copious notes and then turned to his client with a pleasant smile.

"Very well, sir; I will put one of our experts at work on your order immediately. Come back in a couple of days, Mr. Willet, and your speech will be ready for you. I am sure you will like it, and that it will enable you to make a great hit at the banquet."

Joe heaved a sigh of relief as he stepped out of the office.

"It certainly sounds like a mighty good proposition," he mused. "All I will have to do will be to memorize the words. That ought not to be difficult. I think I'm going to succeed after all. The trouble with me hitherto has been that I have always tried to speak extemporaneously. I never thought of learning my speech by heart. That's where I was foolish, of course."

When he called at the office of "The Ready-Made Speech Company," two days later, he found that his oration was ready for him. He perused the manuscript with many expressions of approval and delight.

"Its fine," he declared; "it's simply great. It is bound to make a hit at the banquet."

"Of course it is," assented the manager. "I think it is one of the best speeches we have ever turned out. I am glad you like it, and hope that you will give us many more orders in future."

"I will," Joe promised him. "If I make a success of this I intend to go in for oratory on a large scale, and I shall patronize you frequently. Here is your twenty dollars, sir, and thank you very much."

He took the manuscript home with him, and straightway began the task of committing it to memory.

Every evening after that he walked up and down his little bedroom on the top floor of the boarding-house, reciting his oration aloud and practising the necessary gestures before his mirror.

He purchased books on elocution, and derived great inspiration from their serious perusal.

He read that a great orator had developed his marvelous powers by going out into the fields and haranguing the cabbages and potatoes. He decided to follow this illustrious example, so he went often to the park and, selecting a deserted spot, declaimed his speech to the silent and unappreciative trees.

Before many days had passed he knew every word of his address by heart, and could recite it with great effect—in the seclusion of his bedroom or to the trees in the park.

He was so letter-perfect that he did not entertain the slightest doubt but that he would be able to acquit himself equally as well in the presence of a real audience. And so he awaited the ar-

rival of the great night with confidence and even eagerness.

II.

THE day of the Kenworth Social Club banquet came around at last. Joe Willet drove to the home of Genevieve Carruthers in a taxicab, and took her to the Hotel Burlington, where the dinner was to be held.

He was filled with elation. He felt confident that his speech would make a hit. He was going to win the admiration of the girl he loved by proving himself to be an after-dinner speaker of no mean ability.

Of course, there was the dread possibility that, in spite of all, he might forget his lines when he found himself actually confronting his audience; but he would not permit himself to think that such a calamity could happen.

He had rehearsed that oration so often, and it was so firmly lodged in his mind, that he felt certain even an attack of stage-fright could not drive the words from his memory.

Just to make assurance doubly sure, he had taken the precaution of placing the manuscript in the inside pocket of his dress-coat. If the worst came to the worst, and he found that his memory played him false, it would be better, of course, to read the remainder of the speech from the manuscript rather than make a fool of himself by breaking down completely.

He felt thoroughly confident, however, that this humiliating step would not be necessary; and, with beauteous Genevieve on his arm, he entered the banquet-hall with a firm and joyous tread.

It must be admitted that as the dinner progressed he began to grow a trifle nervous, and that excitement and anxiety affected his appetite so disastrously that he could scarcely touch the dainty food that was placed before him.

"I am going to succeed," he told himself gleefully. "I can feel it in my bones. I am going to deliver that speech without a hitch."

The toastmaster, at the head of the horseshoe of tables, was banging his gavel for order. The waiters were gliding noiselessly from the room. The one hundred diners, men and women, were settling back in their chairs in attentive and receptive attitudes.

The toastmaster delivered his introductory remarks in a loud and sonorous voice. Then he announced the first speaker.

Joe Willet did not know when he was to be called upon, so every time the toastmaster arose to introduce a new speaker, Joe awaited the mention of the name with trembling eagerness, expecting that the fateful moment had arrived.

Several speeches had been made before the toastmaster finally glanced in his direction.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "the gentleman I am now going to call upon for a few words is too well known to all of you to need any introduction."

"He means me," gasped Joe to himself. "He is looking straight at me. My time has come."

He half rose to his feet in his eagerness to face the ordeal.

"I am sure, ladies and gentlemen," went on the toastmaster, "that you will listen to him with great interest, for his reputation as an orator is known to all of you, and I feel sure that you are going to be thrilled by his eloquence."

"I guess he doesn't mean me, after all," thought Joe, sinking hastily into his seat again.

"I refer, of course, to Mr. Fred Sammis," the toastmaster continued. "I take pleasure in calling on him for a few remarks."

Joe's rival, who was seated at the same table as himself, arose to his feet, calm and smiling, and acknowledged the tumultuous applause with a graceful bow.

"Mr. Toastmaster, ladies and gentlemen," he began in a loud, clear tone, "I find it difficult to express the joy which fills my heart to-night, when I stand here gazing upon this brilliant assemblage of wit and beauty. Perhaps I can best describe my feelings by saying that I feel very much like the man whose mother-in-law—but let me tell you the story."

At these words Joe Willet gasped, and his face turned deathly pale. He

shifted uneasily in his chair, and stared at the speaker in open-mouthed astonishment.

As Fred Sammis's speech progressed, the look of bewilderment on Joe's pale face changed to one of horror and rage. His fingers convulsively seized a table-knife, and he half rose from his chair as though about to hurl himself upon the speaker with homicidal intent.

He was plainly very much agitated—and no wonder! Word for word, syllable for syllable, the speech which Fred Sammis was now delivering was exactly the same as the speech which poor Joe Willet had memorized.

The six "brand-new anecdotes," the two "side-splitting puns," the seven "humorous references to the personalities of those present at the dinner," and the forty "touching sentences" which were guaranteed to bring the tears to the eyes of man, woman, or child—all of these verbal treasures, for which Joe had paid twenty dollars cash, and with which he had intended to make a hit at this banquet, were now being offered to the appreciative and loudly applauding audience by his rival, Fred Sammis.

Yes, Sammis had stolen his speech bodily. He had not even taken the trouble of altering a word of it. He was delivering it now just as poor Joe had hoped to deliver it when called upon.

Oh, what a revenge he would wreak upon Sammis for this, he told himself! And yet, after all, he reflected, Sammis might not be to blame. Probably it was that rascally manager of the Ready-Made Speech Company who had played him false by selling the same speech to both of them.

If this was so, he vowed, he would thrash the villain within an inch of his life.

But, sweet as was the thought of revenge, Joe Willet could not afford to linger over it now. He realized, with horror, that pretty soon the toastmaster would call upon him for a speech—and what was he going to do about it?

He could not get up and recite that same speech all over again. That would be too ridiculous. Neither could he get up and explain that the speech he had meant to deliver was the same speech which Sammis had made. That would have been equally as absurd.

If he declined to speak at all when he was called, he would queer himself forever with Genevieve Carruthers; on the other hand, if he tried to speak extemporaneously, without the slightest idea of what he was going to say, the chances were that he would break down and cut a still sorrier figure before the girl he loved.

It was a desperate situation, and poor Joe cudgeled his brain to find a way out of it.

Before he could arrive at any plan of action, however, Fred Sammis finished speaking, and sat down amid a tumult of applause—applause which Joe Willet told himself fiercely should rightly have gone to *him*.

"Ladies and gentlemen," rang out the sonorous voice of the toastmaster, "I am now going to ask for a few words from one who enjoys the high regard of everybody present, a hero who has fought and bled for his country, Mr. Joe Willet."

Everybody applauded, and Joe rose to his feet unsteadily. He had to rise, because, embarrassing though it was for him to do so, it would have been still more embarrassing for him to keep his seat under the circumstances.

His heart was beating like a sledge-hammer against his ribs, his throat was dry, his tongue seemed to be sticking to the roof of his mouth. He was in the grip of stage-fright—the most severe attack of it he had ever experienced.

"Mr. Toastmaster, ladies, and gentlemen," he stammered, "er—Mr. Toastmaster, ladies, and gentlemen—er—Mr. Toastmaster—ladies and—"

In the midst of his agony, as he strove desperately for words as a drowning man struggles for air, his nostrils suddenly caught a peculiar odor, and his gaze, wandering around the sea of faces, saw something at the farther end of the room which suddenly caused his heart to pulsate with joy and his stage-fright to disappear.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he cried in a firm, clear voice, "I beg of you not to get excited. I ask you to remain calm, and leave this room as quietly and as coolly as possible. There is no danger,

of course; but the hotel seems to be on fire, and, for safety's sake, it is better that we all immediately adjourn to the street."

He pointed with a finger that did not tremble to the other end of the room, where wreaths of smoke and little tongues of flame were curling toward the ceiling.

His surprised audience glanced in the direction to which he pointed. They saw the flames, which were eating their way through the floor, and the smoke, which was rapidly filling the room. The smell of burning wood had become quite oppressive. Women screamed with alarm — men jumped excitedly to their feet—a panic seemed imminent.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I beg of you to be calm," cried Joe. "There is no danger, if nobody gets excited. There is plenty of time for all of us to get out safely."

He was completely master of himself now. In the hour of peril, he had no time to think of being self-conscious.

From outside the banquet-hall came loud cries and the patter of many feet. The whole hotel was aroused now. Men and women were rushing frantically to the elevator and stairways. Through the open windows came the shrill screech and the clanging bells of approaching fire-engines.

The guests of the banquet, partly reassured by Joe Willet's calm demeanor, swarmed in an orderly manner through the doorway. Joe and Genevieve Carruthers were among the last to leave.

"It is no use getting excited," he whispered in her ear. "Take it easy, little girl—we'll get out all right."

When they reached the street, the hotel was a mass of flames.

"Thank Heaven, we are safe!" gasped Genevieve fervently. "We had a very narrow escape?"

"Yes, a very narrow escape," answered Joe absently. "That fire came just in the nick of time. It must have been an act of Providence, I guess."

"Why, Mr. Willet, what on earth are you saying?" cried the girl, regarding him with amazement.

But Joe did not enlighten her as to his meaning.

"I want to congratulate you on your coolness in the hour of danger," said Genevieve a little later. "I think you were superb, Mr. Willet. But I am awfully sorry that you were interrupted in your speech. I should so much have liked to have heard the rest of it."

"I guess you didn't miss very much, Miss Carruthers," answered Joe modestly. "By the way, what did you think of Fred Sammis's speech? Don't you think that it was pretty good?"

"Pooh!" replied the girl scornfully. "Fred Sammis is a fraud. I wrote *his* speech myself."

"What?" gasped Joe in great astonishment. "Say that again, Miss Carruthers."

"I suppose it surprises you to hear it; but it is the truth. I wrote that speech myself," laughed the girl. "I make a lot of pocket-money, you see, writing speeches for a concern called the Ready-Made Speech Company. They give me a lot of work to do at home, and the other day they commissioned me to write that speech for a client. Of course, I did not have the slightest idea that that client was Fred Sammis. I did not think that he was such a fraud as all that."

"Gee-whiz!" exclaimed Joe, *sotto voce*. "That makes narrow escape number two for me. If I had delivered that speech, I shouldn't have made such a great hit with Genevieve after all."

The next morning, when he met Fred Sammis in the dining-room of their boarding-house, he said to him:

"My friend, that was a great speech you made last night. Where did you get it?"

"Ha-ha!" snickered Sammis. "That's a good joke on you, Willet. Next time you rehearse a speech for a banquet, take my advice and don't do it so loud. My room is next to yours, you know, and I could not help hearing every word you said as you walked up and down your floor every night reciting that oration. I couldn't resist the temptation to take it all down in shorthand and thus steal a march on you. It was only a joke, you know. Hope you're not mad."

"Not at all," Joe Willet assured him with an inscrutable smile. "I'm tickled to death, old man, that it was you who delivered that speech instead of I."

WAYS TO WEALTH.*

By GEORGE M. A. CAIN,

Author of "Over the Partition."

The matter of a mine that lured, a will that was never made, and the thunderbolt that fell from a clear sky in the peaceful path of a doctor.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THOMAS RAWLEY, an eccentric old man, dies after witnessing the marriage, at his death-bed, of Henry, his foster-son, and Mary, his niece, and daughter by adoption. He leaves no will, and as his only son ran away fifteen years before and is now supposed to be dead, Mary is regarded as his next of kin and rightful heir. She is appointed executrix of the estate, which will revert to her after a year has elapsed. The twelvemonth lacks but two weeks of completion, when a man calls at the residence of the young couple, and announces that he is the son of Thomas Rawley. He is accompanied by Mr. Crookes, a disbarred lawyer, who has just finished a two-year term at Sing Sing. At first the stranger's claim is scoffed at, but Mary, recognizing a scar on his cheek, falls to the floor in a faint, after proclaiming him the rightful heir.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. MONROE TO THE RESCUE.

MARY'S fainting might be taken as typical of what happened to the entire assemblage. If a scene might be said to faint, that is precisely what the little scene in Henry's office did.

It was exactly as though a cat-boat were sailing in a stiff breeze, with all hands to windward for ballast, then suddenly ran under the lee of some huge steamer and lost every breath on its sail.

Boats had been known to capsize to windward under those circumstances. The whole office seemed to capsize to windward.

Thomas Rawley, Jr., had come prepared to fight. His nerves were on edge, and his head ached from his long overdrinking. He felt belligerent all over. And now there was nothing on earth to fight about.

The two officers had come to make an arrest. Their arms were tingling with the professional desire to seize their prisoners. And they were told that there was nothing doing in their line.

Mr. Monroe was on the edge of a legal battle. Whether Thomas Rawley, Jr., were the son of the late foster-father of his clients or no, he felt that he had the upper hand, and was already gloating over the enemy's defeat.

Mary had pulled the corner-stone—or corner-card—out of his little pasteboard structure. Even the disbarred and utterly squelched Crookes was smiling at his discomfiture.

Henry—it is hard to describe his emotions. He had not yet got around fully to realizing his loss. His worst fears had come true. They had taken that particular moment for coming true, when hope had almost mastered them.

His first definite thought was for his wife, and he hurried out to get some brandy. When he had restored Mary to consciousness, the feeling that he himself needed bracing, the feeling that the whole room needed bracing—made him call James and order glasses for all.

The stimulant seemed to have a beneficent effect on everybody.

It mollified the wrath of the policemen who had been called out on a fool's errand. It put Mr. Thomas Rawley, Jr., into immediate good humor. It restored Henry's wits. It enabled Mr. Monroe to regain his self-mastery. Mr. Crookes was so bad that nothing could make him much better or worse.

It was Mr. Monroe who started to bring order out of the chaos.

* *Began October* ARGOSY. *Single copies, 10 cents.*

"You see, Mr. Rawley," he began blandly, "my clients are more than willing to deal squarely in this matter. You will, of course, understand that it was my duty to protect them from any attempt at fraud. I should do as much in protecting you, now that I know who you are, from the wiles of an impostor."

Here he gave a significant glance toward the corner in which Mr. Crookes had deposited his small stature.

"Oh, I see that you're all playing a straight game. I'm much obliged," was Tom's ready assent.

"I think, then," the lawyer went on, "it will be well to dispense with the further services of a man who has just finished serving sentence for fraudulent acts, and who has no legal standing in his profession because of those acts."

Mr. Monroe was master of a compelling magnetism that could be counted on to work upon a person more or less under the influence of drugs or stimulants. Tom Rawley instantly dismissed Mr. Crookes. But, as the unattractive little man passed out, the ex-miner called after him a promise to see him later.

As soon as the door closed behind the one-time lawyer, Mr. Monroe demonstrated that he was really a shrewd member of his shrewd profession. He began with a suggestion that they take a little more brandy. Tom readily assented to that proposition. Mr. Monroe poured both their glasses full. His own glass barely touched his lips.

Tom drank the whole of his. Henry and Mary had both refused to partake again.

"And now," said Mr. Monroe, "I take it for granted that we all would greatly prefer to have this matter settled without the raising of a lawsuit. Lawsuits are costly and usually unnecessary. I always try to keep my clients out of such difficulties.

"I feel quite sure, Mr. Rawley—indeed, a look in your face is enough to convince me that your sense of true sport has caused you deeply to admire the act by which Mrs. Rawley has just put you in the way of a fortune. No doubt you could have proven your identity eventually. But, in her desire to deal with perfect justice, she herself offered the proofs you needed."

"It was darned nice of her to do it, all right," Tom broke in, with fervor.

"Yes"—Mr. Monroe quickly took advantage of this impression—"I have seldom seen anything like it for honesty. In fact, I do not recall another such instance having fallen under my observation. She is one among a thousand in wanting every one to have his rights at no matter how great cost to herself.

"And that brings us to the real point. I know that now you will feel like meeting such a spirit half way. You, too, will be more than anxious to see that this young heroine gets her rights. She *has* rights. While her blood relation to your father is not as close as your own, her position in his household, the services she has rendered him in his old age, the services she has rendered in caring for his affairs since his death—these give her rights, not only moral but legal. The legal rights will hardly trouble your mind now. You will be eager to see that her moral rights are observed.

"And this brings us to the thought of another whose moral rights are deeply concerned in this case. I refer to your dead parent. I am aware that he had his peculiarities. I can readily see how they would have jarred upon a sensitive lad such as you were. But you will pardon me for saying that you did not understand your father.

"He loved you. Many a time I have come upon him with his head bowed in his hands over his desk. For a long while I did not understand his seeming despondency. Then, one morning I surprised him with a revelation. His face was pale. The tears streamed down his cheeks.

"'Oh,' he cried, 'my boy, my boy! Monroe, I can't bear to think of his being away from me, God knows where; perhaps cold and hungry—perhaps dead.'"

As a matter of fact, old Thomas Rawley had seldom required the services of a lawyer. Mr. Monroe's acquaintance had been barely sufficient to warrant his advising the dead man to make a will. But this reference had brought half maudlin tears into the son's eyes. Thomas, Jr., made an almost involuntary move toward the brandy bottle, and Mr. Monroe paused long enough to bid him help himself.

"I can understand how, once you had broken away, pride and fear kept you from coming back. But now, Mr. Rawley, all that is passed. You are sorry. I know you would not willingly have hurt your father for the world had you known."

Thomas Rawley, Jr., would have had to be more than the half-intoxicated man he was to keep back the tears now. He began to blubber like a naughty ten-year-old schoolboy.

"And so, you will wish to make what little reparation you can to his dear memory?" the lawyer went on in his melodious pleading. "All you can do is to see that what we all know were his wishes as to his property are carried out so far as can be done without damaging your real rights.

"Dr. Rawley was found by your father shortly after you had disappeared. He told me once that it was a fancied resemblance to you that attracted him to the ragged boy on the street. Mary Rawley, your cousin, came a little later. By her simple kindness and love she has done what she could to soften the old man's sorrow.

"It was your father's intention to leave all his property to these two. He was convinced that you were dead. Otherwise, he certainly would have wished to provide for you as amply as for those who could never take your place in his affections. So, in taking half of the inheritance, I think you will be only carrying out what would have been his wish had he known that you were alive.

"And so I take the liberty, on behalf of Dr. and Mrs. Rawley here, freely to relinquish to you all claim to one-half the estate left by your father. They will sign a paper to that effect. If you will pardon me, I will make it out in due legal form here and now."

Mr. Monroe took a piece of heavy paper which lay upon the desk. Writing as he spoke, he got off the following declaration:

To whom it may concern:

We, the undersigned, being the sole relatives and heirs of Thomas Rawley, Sr., deceased, do hereby agree and consent, of our own free will, that the estate of the said Thomas Rawley, Sr., both personal and real, shall be so disposed among us that the undersigned Thomas Rawley, Jr., shall receive as his share of the said estate one-half of the total market value of the same, and the undersigned, Mary and Henry Rawley, shall receive and equally divide as their share of the said estate one-half of the total market value of the same.

In case of any dispute hereafter arising as to the aforementioned market value, such dispute shall be decided by such arbiters as shall be mutually agreed upon by us, the undersigned.

In the presence of,
Witness hereunto (Signed).

Mr. Monroe finished, with a slight flourish in his voice.

"Dr. Rawley, will you please ring for your butler and one other of the servants to witness the signatures?"

He said this as though it were a mere detail. The butler and chambermaid were soon in the room. Even while they were coming Mr. Monroe invented a touching little story illustrative of the late Thomas Rawley, Sr.'s, grief for his prodigal son.

Mary and Henry placed their names at the bottom of the sheet of paper. Tom lurched forward at Mr. Monroe's gesture of command.

"We have left the top line for you, though I asked Dr. and Mrs. Rawley to sign first that you might understand there was no trick involved." The lawyer smiled blandly as he extended the penholder toward Tom's trembling fingers.

Tom sat down before the desk. He dipped the pen into the ink. A sigh of relief escaped Henry's lips. Half the property was saved to them anyhow.

But Tom Rawley was not greatly accustomed to the wielding of a pen. Writing was to him more or less of a formal thing. The mere thought of it was always sobering.

With the little instrument poised over the spot where his name was to go, he stopped, looked up, and inquired: "How long is it till this thing—the settlement, I mean—comes off?"

"We shall be able to settle things up now in about ten days," Mr. Monroe hastened to assure him.

"Ten days," Tom repeated after him. "Well, if there's that much time, I'd rather have a day to think this over."

He laid down the pen. And not all the lawyer's insistence that delay in signing would mean delay in settlement could move him to take it up again.

"That was splendid work, Mr. Monroe," Henry said when Tom had said good-by and departed.

"But wasn't it taking a little bit of advantage of him? Was it quite square?" Mary asked hesitatingly.

"My dear Mrs Rawley"—Mr. Monroe smiled wisely—"the religious society from whose hands I received my education has always been unjustly accused of teaching that the end justifies the means. On the contrary, they strictly insisted that the best end would not justify the employment of an even slightly evil means to attain it."

"Ye-es?" Mary said dubiously.

"But I regret to say that, in practical life, I have not always been able to adhere strictly to their teaching."

"Well, then, I don't think we ought—"

"Do not let that side worry you in the least, Mrs. Rawley. Your delightful cousin is about as likely to sign that paper *now*—as the sun is likely to go down in the east this evening."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. CROOKES ADVISES.

THE first act of Mr. Thomas Rawley, Jr., after leaving the apartment-house was the sending of a telegram to his late partner in mining enterprises, William Britt, whom we have already met without the surname, and with the Christian name cut down to the more familiar "Bill."

"Come on next week. I win. Money to burn. The Waldorf-Astoria for ours," read the telegram.

Tom paid the charges for extra words without a qualm. Half of his father's fortune looked good to him. If he was careful about how much he put on the ponies, and how many diamond necklaces he wasted on chorus-girls, there would be enough to make life so merry the next ten years that it would probably end there from sheer excess of mirth.

Tom had a few drinks to celebrate his luck. He had hardly hoped things would come his way so easily. He wanted to tell every one in sight of his good fortune.

Once or twice he half paused, minded to go back and clinch the bargain by signing the paper before his cousin and her husband should change their minds. He was prevented by a glance at his shaking hand. It had been as much the shame of revealing his condition as anything else that had kept him from signing while in the room.

No; he would wait until to-morrow. Meanwhile he would sober up over night. Then ten days—and something like half a million dollars. It was splendid, great, wonderful.

He took another drink, and walked out of the hotel from which he had just sent the telegram.

"Well, how did you make out with your generous relatives?"

It was a very small, very insinuating voice. Tom turned and saw two Mr. Crookes.

"I didn't expect to meet you again so soon," the little ex-lawyer went on, as Tom made a mighty ocular effort to reduce Mr. Crookes's number to one.

As a matter of fact, the disbarred legal light had waited for Tom on the corner nearest the Rawley apartment, and had been following him ever since.

Tom's feelings for the small man had undergone a distinct revulsion. He was half inclined to slap his late adviser. Then the desire to make known his fortune to anybody who would listen got the upper hand.

"G-great!" he cried thickly. "That li'l' gal 'f th' doctorsh ish g-greatesh ever happened. They're goin' t' gimme half th' whole blame shootin'-mash."

There was a sudden change in the tone of Mr. Crookes's mild little voice. From being soft and insinuating, it became sharp, snappy, sarcastic.

"Well, say," he sneered, "for a man of six feet and thirty odd years you come the nearest needing a nurse of any I have ever seen. Half! *Half!* You *are* a fool."

If Tom Rawley had been sober at that moment there would have been as one-sided a fight as was ever pulled off.

His face flushed even more deeply red than the liquor had made it. His fists clenched. He turned to look into a pair

of small, cold, gray eyes, in which there was not the slightest trace of fear. And his hands dropped weakly to his side.

A lot of Mr. Crookes's practise had been with drunken clients.

"Now, you come in here with me," the sharp voice commanded. "And tell me as much as your muddled brain remembers of exactly what happened."

Tom followed as a child follows his father into the room of discipline. If Mr. Crookes had betrayed by a glance over his shoulder the slightest doubt of Tom's obedience, there would have been trouble.

But Mr. Crookes never looked an inch to right or left. He led the way past a glittering bar. Tom's eyes roved toward the bottles for an instant—and returned to the part down the back of Mr. Crookes's hair.

At the one table, in a small rear room, the little man stopped, turned, and motioned Tom into a chair. Tom sat down. A waiter in soiled apron followed them and stood beside the table.

"Two cups of strong black coffee," Mr. Crookes ordered in the same cut-glass, frosty-morning tone.

"I do' want no coffee," Tom growled.

"*I* do," Mr. Crookes snapped laconically; and the waiter, sizing up the situation, went for coffee.

The ex-lawyer sat down and kept his sharp little eyes on Tom's face till the coffee was brought.

"Drink that," Mr. Crookes commanded.

Tom did not even make a show of wishing to refuse.

"Now," Mr. Crookes began in slightly modified tone, "kindly explain to me just the nature of the paper you have been induced to sign."

It was Mr. Crookes's first mistake. Nothing short of infallibility will hold a man in the condition in which Tom Rawley then was.

"I didn't sign no paper, see!" he growled threateningly; "but I'm going to sign it to-morrow, and I wanter know what in Hades it is of your business if I do?"

He half rose from his chair, which creaked ominously.

Mr. Crookes had been through that sort of thing before.

"It is none of my business, Mr. Rawley." He spoke in the cold tone of one who has met with base ingratitude and doesn't need to worry about it personally. "If you choose to sign away your legal rights to some hundreds of thousands of dollars simply because a smooth lawyer and a pretty woman contrive to cajole you out of the money—my concern in the matter is of no consequence. I merely wished to help you with a bit of friendly advice—because I know the kind of tricks some highly reputable lawyers are capable of performing. I *used* to be a reputable lawyer myself."

Slowly a suspicion came into Tom's still befuddled brain. It collided with the suspicion he already felt for the man whom he had found out to have been a rascal.

He wondered which of the two lawyers was framing a scheme against his interest. If Monroe was trying to fool him, he could see through what that scheme was. If Crookes, the proven scoundrel, was planning to fleece him—well, he could tell better by finding out what hand Crookes held.

The coffee and the sense of being in a game of wits combined to sober him. He decided to draw the little man out.

"My cousin, through her legal adviser, is only arranging to get her legal rights. Monroe as much as said that." The thickness had passed from Tom's speech as well as from his head.

"And her legal rights are?" Mr. Crookes had dropped his bullying manner. He was ready to talk cold business with a sober man now.

"Half the es—"

"Half of nothing. Her legal rights are just this—five per cent of the first thousand dollars of the estate, two and one-half per cent of the next ten thousand dollars, and one per cent of all the rest. She has a legal right to that as commission on the business of receiving and paying out the amount she has administered. She has a right to reimbursement for whatever the administration has cost her in money—counsel fees, the salaries of persons employed to manage the business interests, or anything of that sort. She has *no legal* right to a red cent more than that. Is *that* what Monroe as much as told you?"

"But she is my father's niece."

"And you are your father's son, which makes you his sole heir, since you have no brother or sister or mother living."

Thomas Rawley, Jr., did not seem wholly convinced. Mr. Crookes had shamelessly allowed his manner to convey the notion that he had a joker up his sleeve. It was not his game to convince his man too thoroughly. Now, he came to his real point.

"I'll tell you what I am willing to do. I'm willing to take this case without a cent unless I get you the whole estate, less the commissions I have named. I'll do it on condition that, if I win, you give me thirty-three per cent of the half you think belongs to your cousin, or one-sixth of the estate."

A gleam of satisfaction shot into Tom's eyes. He had seen Crookes's hand.

"What can *you* do?" he laughed. "You couldn't appear in any court in the country."

But the laugh quickly turned.

"Of course, I can't appear in person; but I know about fifty members of the bar in this town, any one of whom will be glad to help me get anything I want done. The reputable lawyers may have shut me out of court. They haven't shut me out of the earth."

Tom was convinced. His little catch had failed to work.

"All right, go ahead," he said, and began to rap on the table for the return of the waiter.

"Just a moment until we put this thing into business form," the one-time lawyer protested.

Tom ceased his rapping and told the aproned individual to come back in ten minutes with glasses and whisky. Mr. Crookes drew a piece of paper from his pocket and began to write rapidly. In half a moment he handed over to the examiner an agreement which gave to himself an absolute grant of one-sixth the estate of the late Thomas Rawley, Sr., only conditioned on that estate being inherited intact by Thomas Rawley, Jr.

He proffered his fountain pen for Tom's use in placing his signature at the bottom of this document. Once more that bibulous rascal was seized with a terror of writing implements.

"I'd rather think it over till to-morrow," he said in a tone that was sober and final.

He walked out of the little rear room and took his whisky at the bar.

When he was gone, Mr. Crookes, whose disbarment had nothing to do with that kind of a bar, came out of the little room and took a stiff drink of whisky himself. He needed it to soothe his nerves.

CHAPTER X.

THE SETTLEMENT.

THOMAS RAWLEY, JR., walked as straight as his somewhat unsteady feet would carry him to the apartment of his late father. All the way he indulged in smiles. Once his face straightened.

"By gum!" he exclaimed, "I reckon I've gotter stay sober till after this thing's over with. That's the second time I've been most caught this beautiful morning."

"I suppose you think I'm back to sign that 'ere paper of your smooth-tongued lawyer-chap," he began as soon as he saw the executrix of his father's estate and her husband.

"Cousin Thomas," Mary replied steadily, with the serene light of clear conscience on her face to compel his attention and faith, "we should not think of allowing you to sign such a paper unless you thoroughly understood that, in so doing, you were simply giving us the half of the estate. We did not fully understand what Mr. Monroe seemed to think it his duty to try to do. The ashes of that paper are there on the hearth."

Once more she had quite taken the wind out of his sails. He was at a loss to understand plain honesty. Being at a loss, he stood, sheepishly holding his hat in his hand and waiting for an idea.

"Perhaps you, like ourselves, have not had luncheon yet? Suppose we eat first. Afterward I shall be glad to show you the accounts and other papers that will go into your hands when the estate is settled next week."

She led the way across the hall to the dining-room. Wondering, he followed. Henry brought up the rear.

All through the simple but splendidly

served meal Mary made conversation to cover the general awkwardness of the situation—and of Tom, who was not accustomed to eating in decent society.

In all this she had a definite purpose.

There was no question in her mind that she had a moral right to a portion of the Rawley fortune. She had not the slightest idea that the acceptance of whatever Tom would part with involved the least humiliation or beggary on her part or that of her husband.

But she was quite determined that only fair means should be employed. She would appeal to her cousin's better nature. A character without a preponderating amount of good in it was quite incomprehensible to her pure mind. She was simply bent upon reaching the honorable in Tom Rawley.

Circumstances had put him on the offensive. By her kindness and gentleness she hoped to win him to a recognition of the rights she had no legal means of obtaining.

She was reckoning without due knowledge of Tom Rawley.

Far be it from me to state that any living man is absolutely void of good; but there are some men in whom the good is not discernible to the naked eye. If there is any good in them, we should need, in order to see it, a sort of spiritual or moral microscope that has not yet been invented. And Tom Rawley was one of those men.

He was not rude during that long afternoon of careful explanation of accounts. There was nothing to make rudeness of any advantage; but, an hour before the task was completed, Mary had dismally made up her mind that none of the Rawley fortune was coming to her or her husband.

Henry had grown tired, and sat with long furrows across his forehead. He saw dull ruin staring them in the face, and he was without Mary's optimism to dispel the gloom.

When the whole of the accounts had been gone over, the two protégés of the dead man looked, hoping against hope, into the face of the dead man's son.

They saw that he was satisfied. His dull, dissipated face was without any wrinkle of suspicion. It was also without a smile of appreciation.

Tom Rawley rose to his feet. His thirst was getting busy again. He saw the hopeless faces of the pair. A grin spread over his own.

"Say, you two," he smiled as in anticipation of a joke he was about to spring, "I don't want you to think I'm a perfect hog. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll transfer that there Colorado mine to your possession the day the estate is settled. Oh, don't thank me! If you knew as much about mines as I do, you'd probably tell me to take it to—the hot place with me."

With that he was gone. Henry looked at Mary. Mary looked at Henry. There was despair on both their faces.

But, as soon as Mary had seen Henry's hopeless face, she made her own look hopeful, in spite of the situation.

"Never mind, dear," she faltered. "We've got each other—and we've got the mine. Maybe it's worth something, after all."

"Yes"—Henry tried to speak with a little more cheer than he could feel—"we've got each other. That's more than a billion fortunes. But—the mine is hardly one little bit of a fortune."

But, if Henry and Mary felt as hopeless as they looked when their cousin had departed, they felt more hopeless than they could have looked on the night after the day of settlement.

Tom had been in surly humor all through the formalities. It had made him more surly to see seven thousand and fifty dollars paid to Mary as commission on the handling of the estate, though he brightened at the return of twenty-five hundred, rear rent for the apartment.

His face relaxed into a grin as he transferred the deeds of the mining properties back to his cousin. And then he had calmly hinted that he supposed they might wish to purchase the furniture of the apartment. They had asked for a day or two in which to decide.

"Mary, we can't do it," Henry finally groaned, when he had figured everything for the coming year down to what he regarded as a lowest possible bottom. Once more they were in the library after supper.

"No, we can't do it." Mary had been doing some figuring herself.

They sat quiet for some moments of thought. Henry arose and walked to the desk to look over the mail.

He hoped to find the latest issue of a German medical monthly. The problem of living had become too deep for him. A medical journal would temporarily drive it away from his mind.

"Unless—" Mary began, then hesitated.

"Unless what?" he asked, turning over the yellow envelope on top.

"Unless we can do something with the mine."

Her words reminded him of what he had just seen on the front of the yellow envelope. He turned it over and read the title of the scarlet-printed little article that occupied the space around his name and address — "The Get-There Mining Company" — after which, in smaller type, "Sharpe & Keene" was printed.

There followed a description of the unparalleled results accomplished by the company for its investors in some half dozen mines.

He was accustomed to throwing away about two such envelopes every week. Most professional men are. Even before a professional man gets more than his degree to prove that he *is* a professional man, the mining companies get hold of his name and address. Professional men seem to be especially easy money for laymen.

But, after Mary's words about the mine, he opened this particular yellow envelope and began to glance over the glittering possibilities in the way of securing marvelous values at about five cents on the dollar.

He did not think of investing in any of these mines; but he began to wonder whether Sharpe & Keene might not be a most admirable company to assist in the promotion of his and Mary's mining property.

Mary came to his side, wondering what made her husband neglect to respond to her last suggestion. He held the letter up, so that she might read as he finished.

"But we don't want to buy any mining stock. We've got enough of it already," Mary said when she had read about half a page.

"It isn't that I was thinking of," and Henry smiled for the first time in a week; "but it looks to me as though such convincing advertisers as those could do something with the mine we have. I think I'd better go down and see them in the morning."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MINE GROWS IMPORTANT.

ALL night Henry had grown more and more enthusiastic about the possibilities of his mine—for it had been put in his name by Tom Rawley. From being a piece of utterly worthless real estate, the thing had grown, in sleeping dreams and the other kind, to the proportions of a fortune far more tremendous than the one they had left in the hands of Mary's precious cousin.

He had always regarded with pity the people who bought mining stock on the strength of promoters' testimony, backed up by nothing better than some far-away banker's certificate of the promoters' characters. His late foster-father had taught him that much.

But now he was in a very different position. He himself was the owner. He had something to offer.

Vaguely, he imagined that it might be necessary to let others into the deal with cash to provide the necessary machinery for operating his mine; but he could remain in control.

The bare ownership of the mine would give him sufficient hold to make it quite out of the question that he should furnish more to a stock company or whatever form of organization was necessary to perform the work.

He was so eager to get exact knowledge of his future fortune that he reached the mighty sky-scraper before any of the offices were open. As soon as the door that was not marked private was unlocked, he opened it and went in.

He stood outside a rail-fence; or perhaps it would be more correct to say that he stood inside, and that the two dozen stenographers were outside, already getting down to work with their typewriters. A freckle-faced boy in a very neat uniform came forward to receive Henry's card.

"Mr. Sharpe or Mr. Keene," Henry

spoke in reply to the boy's questioning glance.

"They ain't in yet," the boy said indifferently. Then, as he glanced a second time at the "M.D." on Henry's card, he invited the doctor inside—or outside—the rail and gave him a seat by a long table in another room.

The table was covered with mining magazines. Henry picked up one of these and soon found an article about the wonderful development going on in a mine of which Sharpe & Keene were managing the brokerage end. It was, moreover, a silver-mine and in Colorado.

Henry half wondered why the periodical had opened so easily at that special article, but his wondering was cut short by the appearance of a very sprucely-dressed young man.

"If you will come this way, Dr. Rawley," the spruce young man said, "Mr. Keene will be able to see you in a minute."

Henry followed him into a smaller room and sat down to wait again. There were no magazines in this room; but the walls were lined with splendid photographs of working mines and mining towns, bearing, in plainly visible type, the names of various mines which Henry remembered being mentioned in the circular he had read the previous evening.

The door opposite the one by which he had entered was of glass. Through it Henry watched a fine-faced gentleman of something more than middle age, who was bidding a very cordial good-by to a man whose side-whiskers and general get-up bespoke the prosperous country physician.

As the other physician disappeared, the young man opened the glass door and bade him enter the presence of the great mine-broker.

If Henry had felt the slightest misgivings as to what manner of man he would meet, these misgivings instantly vanished in the presence of Mr. Keene.

There was nothing loud about his dress or manner. He did not suggest the cheap bucket-shop broker nor the rough Westerner. He was evidently a solid, wealthy man, whose word would be as good as his bond.

His counterpart in appearance might be seen through the front windows of a national bank. One could not help imagining that Mr. Keene was the superintendent of the Sunday-school in the rich suburban church of which he was probably a member.

His manner was impressive; not, perhaps, the sort of manner to impress a countryman, but the quiet, gentle, easy manner that impresses other men of real affairs. Henry could not help but wonder how such a man could bring himself in contact with the flaring advertisements of the firm's circular-letters.

"Very glad to see you, Dr.—" Mr. Keene referred to Henry's card—"Dr. Rawley."

His voice was free from anything like smooth oiliness; likewise, free from boisterous enthusiasm such as a real-estate salesman uses in disposing of lots on the instalment plan. He managed, also, to convey the idea that he was a busy man who would not care to waste time on anything unless it was worth considering.

"I understand that your firm is interested in promoting mines," Henry said, intending to come directly to the point.

"We flatter ourselves that we have built up something of a reputation by assisting in the starting of several of the most successful mines in the country. That sort of thing comes, of course, through the care we have made it our rule to exercise in knowing exactly what we are handling. We have been careful of our investors' interests. That is why we have so many investors."

If Mr. Keene's selection of words came easily, as though he had said the same thing a good many times before, Henry did not notice the fact.

Mr. Keene's words about the firm's care with regard to what it handled made Henry hesitate a moment for the best way to state his errand.

He knew very little about his own mine. There were testimonies and statements of experts in the big envelope in his pocket. There were liberal estimates as to the quantity and quality of the ore discovered in his mine some fifteen years ago; but whether these things would satisfy so exacting a house as that of Sharpe & Keene was a question that worried him a little.

Mr. Keene occupied the time while Henry was hesitating.

"There are, as you know, a number of mining propositions on the market at lower prices than those we quote on our mines," he explained. "Of course, you will understand the reason. Our mines are certainties. You are safe in regarding our promotion of a mine as a guarantee that it is as sure of success as any mine not entirely developed can possibly be. Now, to-day I am especially enthusiastic myself about Loadstone Silver. I consider it the best we have. Next week the price of Loadstone will be doubled. If you want to put some money into—"

Henry suddenly realized that he was taking Mr. Keene's time by leaving him in misapprehension of his purpose.

"Excuse me," he interposed, "I did not come to invest in mines. I own a mine myself."

"Oh—ah—that is very different. It puts you in a—very much better position. Of course, you know that no mine is an absolute certainty. What appears a most alluring lead, a most splendidly rich vein, may suddenly disappear entirely. But the owner of a mine cannot lose any more after he has bought it. Where is this mine?"

"It is somewhere in the silver country in California. I confess that I don't know much about it. The thing came to me by way of an inheritance."

"Lucky man! Whichever the way the thing turns out, you cannot lose."

Henry thought about the things he had lost, but he did not mention them. It could hardly further his interests to appear in the light of a pauper. He laid the big envelope before Mr. Keene.

"Ah, Hinsdale County!" Mr. Keene's tone showed increasing interest. "Our Hot Stuff Mine was in Hinsdale County. The stock is quoted at double par now, and none of it on the market. It's a good county."

Henry's hopes began to grow. They kept on growing as Keene continued:

"Why, bless me, if it isn't right next neighbor to the Hot Stuff! It is one of the best spots in the world. Dr. Rawley, I do not believe you will need to worry much about your practise with a mine like this. It's a shame it's been left standing all these years. This paper is fifteen years old. Has nothing ever been done to the mine?"

"Nothing that I know of, save what is recorded by the experts as being done in locating it."

"Strange, I suppose the owner—your uncle, was it?—must have been unable to attempt to develop it. You might be a rich man to-day; but silver is higher now than ever. Maybe you're lucky, after all."

Henry thought he was a great deal luckier than Mr. Keene could know. If the mine had been worked and proven successful, it would never have been given to him.

"Well, now, if you like, you can leave these papers here for us to look over. I suppose you have copies, or these are copies?"

Harry confessed that he had not, but was quite willing to let Mr. Keene keep the papers in his possession long enough to look them over more carefully. He had no doubt of the man's honor—his manner was too utterly sincere. Besides, there was a record of the deeds of transfer in the court and another with Mr. Monroe.

"Drop in the day after to-morrow," Mr. Keene urged, as he arose and let Henry out of the door to the main hall of the sky-scraper.

Henry went home on a Subway express. He felt that he was riding in the air. All their worries and fright over future poverty had been without reason.

He wondered if it was not quite providential that the rest of his foster-father's fortune had been taken away. Had it been left, he would certainly have neglected the mine and its probable millions.

Mary entered into his enthusiasm.

"I tried to get you to do something with that all the year," she put in. "I knew Uncle Tom would not take up with any mining scheme that did not look pretty favorable."

They could hardly wait till the second morning.

For a period of forty-eight hours Henry lost interest in medical journals.

CHAPTER XII.

MORE INTERESTING YET.

WHEN Henry presented himself again at the office of Sharpe & Keene he was

not compelled to wait more than half a minute. From the inner waiting-room he saw a very obvious clergyman being almost hurried away to give place to himself. Mr. Keene came out of the glass door to invite him within.

"I was half minded to call at your house last evening," the quiet gentleman began. "To tell the truth, I have grown quite enthusiastic about your mine. That is saying a great deal for a man who has been in this business as long as I have, isn't it?"

Henry felt fresh waves of enthusiasm playing tag up and down his spine.

"Really," Mr. Keene went on, "there has been nothing so apparently good in here in a long while. Unless those experts who examined the mine originally were the veriest rascals, we have discovered a second Hot Stuff. I don't think that we ought to put this on the market at less than twenty-five dollars a share—that is, if it turns out as good as it looks."

"And how are we going to find out for sure about that?" Henry asked.

He was certain that Sharpe & Keene could easily attend to that detail. He was merely interested to know how they went about it, and how long it would take before the mine could be turning riches into his pockets.

"Oh, we have mining experts in our employ, of course. We'll just send one out there to get a report. If he is as favorable as these others, it will be time to organize. You know how these things are done, don't you?"

Henry confessed ignorance.

Mr. Keene enlightened him. "The first thing is the formation of a stock company. We will organize, say, in Arizona."

"Gracious! Have I got to go to Arizona about it?"

"Oh, no. We have a lawyer in Arizona to attend to that part. Arizona laws are a little the easiest to incorporate under; that is all. We will capitalize at —well, I should say in this case five million dollars would be small."

Henry could hardly keep from whistling with joyful surprise.

"That represents the value of the mine, its machinery, and so forth."

"But there is no machinery," Henry exclaimed, beginning to feel nervous at the thought of putting money into expensive equipment.

"Not *yet*. We sell stock to buy machinery. Don't you understand?"

Henry hated to admit that he did not quite understand.

"Well, it's very simple. When you organize, you have the undeveloped mine as capital. Then we put a certain amount of the stock on the market—say a third. That makes one-third of five millions. Suppose we sell that at twenty dollars a share. That brings us in approximately three hundred and thirty-three thousand dollars.

"You have that to build machinery, pay the officers' salaries, and any other expenses. The machinery will cost about one hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That would be enough to start with. If other veins should seem to show up well later on, we can build more machinery on the profits of the original mine."

Harry's mouth had opened in amazement at the ease with which this man spoke of such enormous deals. He saw himself already more than three times a millionaire.

"But you speak of the officers. Who are they?"

Mr. Keene smiled indulgently.

"Why, yourself, of course, and any others whom you may choose to put in as officers and directors in the original company as organized. As directors, you decide what salaries you are to receive. Where else would you make anything?"

"Why, I supposed we were to make on the profits of the mine itself," Henry suggested innocently.

"Oh, that comes later. When the mine begins to pay, as I'm sure this mine will pay, you go on receiving your salary as president or secretary, or whatever you choose to be, and you take, besides, dividends on your stock."

Henry hesitated. He wondered whether it was quite right for him to draw a salary for a business before that business had begun to pay. He hated to hint that any suggestion of Mr. Keene's could be other than absolutely straight; but finally decided to ask for more explanation of the point.

"Why wouldn't it be right?" Mr. Keene asked in amazement. "Are you

to work for nothing? Suppose any business is starting. Are none of the clerks in a grocery-store to receive any wages until enough stuff has been sold to pay off the cost of the first stock?"

Henry blushed. He was ashamed of having questioned anything so simply honorable.

"And how much salary would I have a right to take?"

Again Mr. Keene smiled indulgently.

"That will depend largely on the sale of the stock. So long as you don't take so much as to cripple the working of the mine, nobody is apt to ask any questions. There ought to be about a hundred thousand for directors' salaries in this, if the stock sells well. Of course, yours will be the largest salary of the amount. You should get upward of twenty thousand dollars."

Henry could hardly contain himself. He felt that he must hurry home immediately and tell Mary about the new wonders.

One matter, however, remained a mystery to him yet. He wanted to be absolutely sure of everything.

"But where do you people come in on all this?" he asked.

Mr. Keene smiled genially and kindly.

"We have to be satisfied with the humble broker's commissions on what we sell. Of course, if anything particularly good shows up, we are ready to buy in a lot of stock ourselves at the ground-floor prices."

That was all Henry felt he wanted to know. Everything was as straight as he had been sure it must be under the supervision of such a man as Mr. Keene. He picked up his hat, eager to get the good news to his wife immediately.

"Just a moment," said Mr. Keene, detaining him. "I suppose you want our expert to go ahead and investigate, so that we can get down to business as soon as possible?"

"Why, of course I do," Henry replied without hesitation.

"Well, we haven't any one in Colorado just now, so it will cost you a trifle more than it would six or eight months from now; but the whole thing won't come to more than three or four hundred dollars. If you'll just sign an agreement permitting us to go to that amount, we ought to get his report back in less than a month."

Henry paused for just a moment. He thought of the uses to which their little thirty-five hundred dollars had to be put, and the thought took away some of his pleasure.

But Mr. Keene quite brought back the glow of enthusiasm when he laid the signed authorization on his desk and cordially bade Henry *au revoir*.

Again the Subway express seemed a balloon as it hurried the young physician back to his waiting wife. He felt absolutely feverish.

He bought a mining magazine he saw on the news-stand while waiting for the train. Medical journals were hardly exciting enough for his present mood. And he was so interested in what he read of silver-mines on the train that he almost forgot to change for a local at Forty-Second Street.

But he could not resist the impulse to make the most of the tremendous news he had. He drew the longest face he could manage as he entered their apartment.

"Mary, dear," he asked, with assumed mournfulness, "do you think we can pull through a year?"

"I'm afraid we can't do it on what we have," Mary said, with a mournfulness that was not assumed. "We couldn't do it without discharging all the servants. And, even then, I don't see how we could manage after paying for this furniture."

"But, don't you think we could possibly manage on—twenty thousand?"

And then, in reply to her amazed inquiry, he told her the whole story—told it wrong end first, then from the middle, then back to the beginning.

Mary forgot that she had not yet left off mourning for her dead uncle, and they waltzed about the room in sheer childish glee. When she did remember her black gown, she insisted on going to her room to change it.

The year of mourning was up, anyhow. She came back looking so attractive in a bright blue morning dress that Henry hugged her on the spot.

Half a dozen times during the luncheon he got up and walked to her side to put into kisses the happiness no words could express.

For the first time in his medical career, he felt chagrined when the door-bell rang at two o'clock and James announced a waiting patient in his office.

The two dollars that the man insisted on paying for the prescription Henry gave him seemed hardly worth pocketing.

He rushed back to the library to tell Mary how it was to be done for the twenty-fourth time. There was another ring of the door-bell, and he felt positively angry.

But, as James announced that the visitor was none other than Mr. Thomas Rawley, Jr., his anger somewhat subsided. He even felt a little kindly toward Mary's cousin who had given them a richer inheritance than he had taken from them.

"I come around to see what you're goin' to do with the furnichoor," Tom said a little gruffly. "I suppose you'll want all or the most of it."

Still, Henry could not feel quite harshly toward the man. And he rather felt a desire to let Tom know how much he had really, if unintentionally, parted with.

"I don't know but what we shall want all of it," he replied. "If you had come around three days ago, I'm afraid we would hardly have said so."

"How's that?" Tom inquired, more genial now that he saw prospects of an actual sale.

"Why, that Colorado silver-mine seems to be turning out pretty well. I guess there will be two or three million in it." Henry tried to keep his voice from a tone of blatant boasting.

"Ain't started to work it yet, have ye?" Tom asked without seeming to be much startled.

"No," Henry smiled, "not yet. But we've put it into the hands of a good mining company, and—"

"Oh," Tom broke in. His tone showed relief that he had not let slip through his fingers anything that had been definitely shown to be of great value. "Well, mebbe you can do somethin' with it that way. But, now, how much are you goin' to offer for this stuff?"

Henry came down to earth. It suddenly dawned upon him that he could lay hands on only a little over three thousand dollars, and that this amount all together would be a pitifully small offer for the rich furnishings which a wealthy man had gathered about himself in some forty years.

Fortunately Mary came in at this moment.

"Of course, Cousin Thomas," she began without waiting for her husband to make any grievous mistake, "the furniture has a special value in our minds on account of its associations. We would gladly pay a little more for it than you could get out of some furniture dealer or auction sale. That is—if we can afford to buy it at all right now."

"Well, I thought you would. So I brought along a man from Horowitzski's to see what the furnichoor dealers *would* give. I'll just fetch him in if you ain't no objections."

A dark little man, with ratlike eyes, and two days' growth of beard on his face, went through the whole apartment. Beds, chairs, tables, he shook to test their solidity. Hangings he examined by rubbing with his none-too-clean fingers. Carpets he pulled up at the corners, shoving the furniture right and left to examine their edges. He even struck a few bars of ragtime from the grand piano in the library to try its tone.

From time to time he jotted down figures on a greasy bit of cardboard. At the end of his mildly disastrous journey, he sat down uninvited before the library-desk and figured in silence for some minutes.

"Well, Minovitch," Tom urged impatiently, "how much will you give me?"

The dark little man finished a quick problem in percentage. He was an expert, and knew to the penny just what it would cost to renovate the furniture, and how much it would bring in certain would-be fashionable flats on the upper West Side.

"I vill gif you two t'ousan' fife hundert dollar," he said shortly.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VANISHING BANK-ACCOUNT.

Henry looked at Mary. Mary looked at Henry. Both realized that the furniture was worth nearly double what the

dealer had offered. Both realized quite as clearly that the figure he had named was entirely beyond their means. Four hundred of their thirty-five hundred was already pledged to Sharpe & Keene. To take the furniture at twenty-five hundred would leave them six hundred on which to live—for, perhaps, three months.

It was, as usual, Mary who first found her voice.

"I think we can give you that," she said quietly to her cousin.

This time Henry looked at Mary, but Mary did not look at Henry. He had his mouth open, as well as his eyes. As he did not attempt to speak, it would seem that his mouth was open with some vague notion of seeing more with it than he could with his eyes.

But Tom did not immediately dismiss Minovitch, as Mary had expected he would. He turned a questioning eye upon the second-hand-furniture man.

"I could make it t'ree t'ousan'," the dark little man bid sharply.

Henry looked at his wife again. His mouth shut, and his eyes showed his utter hopelessness.

"Very well, we'll make it three thousand."

Mary spoke with the same cool, businesslike tone. A slight flush of anger spread over the face of Minovitch. Evidently, bidding against people who were only required to match his bids did not strike him as businesslike.

He frowned at the pasteboard bearing the figures he had made. In reality he was reaching the conclusion that his opponents would go as high as he chose to go.

"That iss all I vill gif," he said finally, and picked up his hat.

Mary saw him out of the front door, and came back to her cousin and husband. Tom was looking at Henry, as though wondering why that young medical man did not rise to make out the check for the three thousand dollars.

Henry was looking at an extremely interesting angle in the pattern of the rug. As Mary entered, he transferred his gaze to her face. His eyes said very plainly: "Now you have done it."

"I'm glad he is gone." Mary smiled —fairly beamed—upon the face of her cousin. "I'm afraid you have not had much experience with second-hand-furniture dealers. Of course, they do not cheat one quite as badly as one gets cheated when things go at auction."

"Why, why—how's that?" stammered Tom, taken aback by the turn Mary had given things.

"If you had known anything about furniture, you would know that the things in this house are worth over four thousand dollars. You can be sure that Minovitch knew that."

"Then, why didn't he offer more?" Tom asked argumentatively.

"Because he wishes to make a profit of about seventy-five per cent," Mary answered promptly. "He doesn't care to handle things on a much smaller basis than that."

Henry took no part in the conversation. His utter amazement at his wife's conduct of affairs had got beyond even the staring-point. He shut his eyes and waited to hear what she would do next. He heard:

"We will be glad to give you four thousand dollars for the furniture. If it is not worth that to a furniture dealer, it is worth it to us for its associations."

Henry clutched at the arms of his chair for support.

He felt as though he were about to slip off into space. Where did Mary hope to get four thousand dollars?

"Well, say," Tom spoke in almost as great amazement as kept Henry from speaking, "I don't know whether you're a bit *loco,* or just plain honest to the foolish degree; but you surely do hand a son of a gun a devilish square deal."

"Your father brought us up to try to be honest, Cousin Tom," Mary said, with a very gentle, very winning, smile. "Of course, you know, we are not able to pay you the whole of the price of the furniture right now," she went on when the smile had had time to take effect.

Tom's face fell. But, after the generous treatment he had just received at Mary's hands, even his natural ugliness refused to come into play.

"I guess we can fix that up all right," he tried to say easily. "How much could you pay down?" There was more eagerness in his voice as he asked the question.

"I think we can spare about seven

hundred dollars now. And we'll give you some sort of mortgage on the rest for three months, until the mine begins to pay."

Tom spent a moment in reflection. Probably he figured that the furniture would bring as good a price from Horowitzski's at the end of three months as now.

"Make it an even thousand, and I'll see you," he finally offered.

Quietly Mary walked to her desk and wrote a check for one thousand dollars. Then, between them, they drew up a chattel mortgage for three thousand dollars more at three months and six per cent interest.

They got Mr. Monroe over the phone to tell them the proper form of words. Half an hour later they took a cab at Tom's expense and reached the City Hall in time to record the mortgage.

"Well, Mary," Henry began, as Tom rode off in his cab and they started for the Subway entrance, "I suppose you tried to do it all for the best, but I don't exactly see why you offered that extra thousand dollars."

"Do you imagine we could have furnished the apartment to look decently for less than four thousand?" Mary asked.

"I suppose not. But we had him at three."

"Indeed we didn't. If I had not offered him an extra thousand, it would have been three thousand cash. I thought it would be just as well to keep back a little for household expenses while we're waiting for the development of our mining enterprise."

But they felt a little dampened in their ardent hopes that evening. They were just a trifle less enthusiastic in planning what they would do when the mine began to pay.

And when, at the end of the month, they were still waiting for the report of Sharpe & Keene's expert, and had to pay the wages of the servants, the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick-maker, also the rent-collector, the joys of the wealth to be began to take a very secondary position.

Another consideration was assuming large and impressive proportions. Were they going to be able to pull through until the money began to come from the mine?

(To be continued.)

THE KEY TO THE SITUATION.

By CORA L. BROWN.

A desperate expedient resorted to by a man on the high seas to prevent his friend from doing him a good turn.

"GOOD Heavens! I've lost my trunk key!"

I looked up, startled at Blake's vehemence. He was bobbing about the stateroom frantically, bumping his head on the berths, peering into impossible places, and spasmodically exploring his trousers-pockets.

"A key! What does a key amount to?" I asked lightly. "Now, if it had been one of your pet cigars, and you had to depend on the chunks of hawser sold on this boat—"

"Heavens, Stanton, don't jest!" he interrupted. "It's really serious, and affects you more than it does me."

I straightened up at this. Blake came along to help me sell a play I had written. He was not a regular dramatic agent, but he had an established reputation among theatrical people, and had hopes of placing my work.

He knew of two actresses in London who were looking for just such a play, and we were on our way across the water to put it up to them.

"Is there anything in the trunk you are in need of?" I asked.

"Is there?" he cried. "The opening wedge for the sale of your play is in my trunk."

I became alert at once. "Have you looked in your vest pocket?" I suggested.

His worried look changed to one of instant relief as he reached into the pocket aforesaid and, with a relieved smile, brought out the key.

It was but a moment's work to open the trunk, and I watched with eager curiosity while he took from it a box of crystallized ginger. My disappointment was evident.

"Scarcely worth tearing one's hair over, especially when the ship's barber carries ginger galore in his stock," I remarked.

"Not this brand, my boy. See that oriental design on the lid? It's specially imported," he explained impressively. "This particular box of ginger is to aid the digestion of an actress who at one time was adored by two continents. I just discovered that she is on board. She's out on deck now—waiting for it. She hasn't been playing for over five years. Now she is looking for a play—also ginger," he added, with a whimsical smile, and hurried from the room.

I became excited at once. Here was luck thrown at me before I sought it. A real actress on board. My hopes kept growing and enlarging until the room grew too small for me, and I went on deck for air and larger scope.

As I paced back and forth I glanced casually at the long line of reclining-chairs, filled with recumbent figures enjoying sun-baths.

One chair, because of the size of its burden, stood out in relief from the others. As I drew nearer, the bundle resolved itself into a woman of more than ample proportions munching, with apparent satisfaction, Blake's ginger. There was no mistaking the label on the box.

I was stunned. It was such a crash from the heights my fancies had climbed. Imagine such a woman portraying my slim, boyish-like heroine. It would be a caricature. My drama would become a howling farce.

I must find Blake at once. I searched in vain on the decks and in the smoking-room.

At last I found him in our cabin. He was on his knees, pawing in his trunk with one hand and wiping the perspiration from his face with the other.

"What do you hold against my play?" I began indignantly. "Why do you want to caricature it by suggesting that such a woman act the leading part?"

"Oh, Stanton," he cried in a relieved tone, utterly ignoring my remark, "maybe you know where it is. A book of Mrs. Hemans's poems. I'm sure I saw it somewhere."

"You did," I answered dryly. "It is my book. You saw it in my trunk."

"There! I thought you'd help me out." He jumped up with alacrity, smoothing his hair and straightening his tie.

"I didn't know you were a devotee of Hemans's?" he added.

"Nor does any one else," I retorted sharply. "It's a gift-book with which one of my adoring friends presented me at the dock. I never opened it."

"I'm in a hurry," and he held out his hand for the volume I had mechanically taken from my trunk for him.

"I want to talk with you," I began, but he was already out of hearing. Of course he wanted the book for another stepping-stone with that fat actress.

I went outside again and passed the huge creature to verify my suspicions. She was devouring the contents of Hemans with as much avidity as she had the ginger.

"Oh, Stanton!" I knew it for Blake's voice. Then I remembered that he must have been sitting at the foot of her steamer-chair.

I wouldn't go back and meet her. I wasn't in any frame of mind for that just then. I knew that his call could have meant nothing but an introduction. She had bothered me enough already by her very presence; so I hurried on, pretending that I had not heard.

That night, as we were climbing into our bunks, I poured all my bottled-up indignation into Blake's unsympathetic ears. I accused him of every known crime on the calendar, and told him he was ruining my prospects by offering the play to such a person.

"Don't worry," he said soothingly, as though I were a babe in arms. "Just trust things to me. I don't like to talk about business. You know I'm an old hand at this game.

"Besides," he continued, with a chuckle, "there is a tendency among actresses not

in the lime-light toward stoutness. Her figure isn't bad for a woman of her age."

"Her age! That's just the trouble," I cried hopelessly.

He seemed greatly amused at my remark, and went on:

"Don't you worry. Leave it to me."

It was useless to argue. I had to depend on him to market the play, and it was to his advantage as well as mine to place it well. All I could do was to hope and wait and be silent; for he refused absolutely to go into details with me.

An introduction to Miss Ainsworth was unavoidable, and I suffered through it, but *tête-à-têtes* were not. I hoped she would dislike me to such an extent that she would refuse to read my manuscript when Blake should reach the crucial point. I knew she had shown no signs as yet of asking to read it.

At breakfast, on the day before we were to land, Blake seemed so excited he could scarcely eat. With suppressed eagerness he turned to me and said, in a low voice:

"I am waiting for Miss Ainsworth. She has asked to read your play this morning."

I was as depressed as he was elated. I had hoped for such big things, and this was the outcome; for, of course, if she read it she would want it. I knew its merits.

Leaving the table, I sought the deck. Suddenly I remembered that Blake had told me Miss Ainsworth was meeting an actress friend in London, and going on directly to Rome, where she expected to read a play in which she seemed to have great interest.

This gave me an idea. If she didn't read my play now, there was little chance that she would ever read it.

My head grew dizzy with a sudden thought. I could fix it so Blake wouldn't have an opportunity to sell her the play, and thus spoil its chances.

Looking around apprehensively, I rushed to our stateroom at once; rapid action was necessary. Luckily I was in time; Blake was not there. I didn't want to antagonize him; I couldn't afford to. He was the only person who had given me encouragement, so I chose a course of my own.

I quickly turned the key in my unlocked trunk and went on deck again, safe in the feeling that my play was securely locked up. Then I placed the trunk key on my key-ring, where it would be safe, and took from the ring another key that was absolutely useless. It was an old key to an ancient case that had been smashed, and I had never taken the trouble to remove it from the ring. This key I now held tightly in my hand.

Leaning over the rail, I fingered it in an absent-minded manner and waited. Much depended on the cleverness of my acting.

"Well, Stanton, your play is to have a chance sooner than we anticipated when we started."

It was Blake's voice in his happiest mood. He had joined me at the rail, as I had expected he would.

At the first word I started and turned. The substituted key slipped from my fingers, as I had planned, and fell into the ocean.

"Oh, how careless of me!" I cried, turning, with a look that I hoped would make him think I had dropped the key accidentally.

"I hope you won't be too disappointed," I began. "My key—my trunk," I stammered. "I—I locked it this morning, and the manuscript was in it, and—"

"You've just lost the key overboard!" he cried in an excited tone, staring at me.

"Yes," I answered, vaguely glad that he had taken the burden of the lie on his own shoulders. "What shall we do?"

At that moment Alice Ainsworth called to him. He was a keen little business man, and rushed off to her at once, without answering me.

I was not at all proud or pleased with what I had done. Still, I was not sufficiently repentant to offer to smash open the trunk and give him the play, to be put on with such a frightful-looking star.

I walked up and down the deck several times past where Blake sat with her. I hoped he would call me over and have me explain my awkward accident. But he didn't seem to see me at all, and was talking to her in a direct and personal manner all the time. I feared that he had found out my trick, and was purposely avoiding me.

Every time I passed Alice Ainsworth her eyes had such an amused look that I felt like a cad. I became certain that Blake had told her of the key episode, and she no doubt was amused at my self-confidence and absurd coolness.

What a fool I had been. She would have recognized in a moment that the play was not suited to her face and form, and I would have had at least her good-will, in place of the contempt I seemed to know she now felt for me.

A ship is not an exciting place to be when one is on bad terms with one's self. I went to the smoking-room and tried to become interested in solitaire. I hoped Blake would come in, so I could have it out with him. But he didn't show up. I fished for my pipe.

It wasn't in my coat. Suddenly I remembered. I had thrown it in the tray of my trunk—the locked trunk. I never wanted anything so badly in my life as I did that old brier.

But why shouldn't I slip down to the stateroom, unlock the trunk with the real key, which I had taken care of, and get my pipe?

So, looking carefully around me, like a guilty man, I sneaked down to our stateroom and, finding that Blake was nowhere about, I inserted the key carefully and opened the trunk.

Spying the pipe the very first thing, I made a dive for it, put it in my pocket, slammed down the lid, and locked it.

I had no sooner done so than the door flew open, and Blake bounced in.

"Hallo, Stanton! Where'd you get your pipe?" he cried first thing. "I thought it was in your trunk."

"It was," I answered slowly, trying with all my wits to think up a valid excuse. Then it came in a flash. "But I took the pipe out this morning before I lost the key."

"Oh!" he answered lightly, picking up something he had come for, and darting out of the room again before I could say anything more.

I was certain he knew all about my double work with the two keys. Why wouldn't he be man enough to own it, instead of keeping me in a continual cold sweat? Why didn't he tell me out and out that he would have nothing more to do with my play?

Neither he nor Alice Ainsworth appeared at dinner. I didn't feel companionable, so I went back to my game of solitaire immediately after the meal.

Once I caught sight of Blake and the fat actress on deck. They seemed deeply engaged in a serious conversation, and I managed to turn back without their catching sight of me.

That night we anchored in the Thames to wait for the tide to take us in to Tilbury, our docking place. We were to breakfast at seven, as our train left at nine for London.

I stayed in the smoking-room for an hour or so, and then went out on deck.

It was quite cold, and I realized that I must put on warmer clothes.

I shivered continually. There was no good running the risk of catching cold. I must go down to my stateroom and put on a good, heavy sweater. And that sweater was in my trunk. And, what was more, Blake had seen me stow it away there.

But finally I got so cold I simply had to go down for the sweater.

As luck would have it, Blake was not in the room.

Pulling out the key, I knelt beside the trunk and, like a thief, stealthily opened it and withdrew the sweater.

Then I locked it again carefully, all the time watching the door with one eye. My heart was beating wildly. For once I experienced all the excitement a burglar must feel.

I sneaked out of the room like a ghoul, and hurried on deck.

There I found myself face to face with Blake. He paused a moment, and looked me up and down.

Then his eyes rested on my sweater, and he asked me in a puzzled tone:

"Why, where'd you get the sweater, Stanton? I was going to borrow it about ten minutes ago. I looked all over the room, but couldn't find it. Then I remembered it was in your locked trunk."

I couldn't think of any answer. Then suddenly something came to me with the bright flash of an inspiration.

"I've had it on for the last hour," I told him. "That's why you couldn't find it in the stateroom."

He gave me a strange look and hurried on, calling out, "Good night."

I felt guilty.

I lived in momentary peril. I was in terror of that key.

I finally went to bed, and was greatly relieved to find that Blake was already in his berth, sound asleep. Luckily we had not had a chance for a long conversation since I had pulled off my crude scheme to frustrate his ambition of selling the play to Alice Ainsworth.

When I awakened, Blake had already dressed and left the stateroom. My packing required but a few minutes. As my trunk was locked, I threw what loose stuff I had into my suit-case. I didn't care to run the risk of opening it again. It was too hard on my nerves.

When I reached the deck I found that several people had run up from London to come aboard for breakfast with the friends they were meeting.

I went into the dining-saloon alone. At Alice Ainsworth's table I noticed two strangers. I couldn't keep my eyes off them. One must be the actress friend Miss Ainsworth was to meet in London, my mind suggested suddenly.

They were both radiant girls. Blake was leaning over their chairs talking animatedly. How I envied him.

One was a vivacious blond, quite stunningly beautiful. But the brunette—the slim, boyish-looking girl with the frank brown eyes. Ye gods, if she were only an actress, and would consent to be my heroine!

Suddenly I met Alice Ainsworth's eyes. She bowed pleasantly, and turned to say something to Blake. I blushed, as I felt it must be something about me and my locked trunk.

What a fool I had been! As I sat there I felt that Miss Ainsworth had a beautiful face, of a calm and intellectual cut. Why hadn't I noticed it before?

The coffee was insipid. I choked on the toast. Blake came over to the table. Our eyes did not meet, for which I was glad. He seemed to be in a hurry, and leaned over me abruptly to remark in a low voice:

"The oddest thing has happened, Stanton. The two people I wanted most to read your play, the ones I was coming across to see, have just come on board to greet Miss Ainsworth. I have been talking with them."

My heart beat wildly. I could scarcely breathe for the emotions surging through me.

"Then the slim, boyish girl *is* an actress?" I cried, hurrying on with: "Is she the friend you said Miss Ainsworth was to meet in London, and go on to Rome with? Have you told her of my play?"

"Yes, Stanton. That's Clarice Clare, a very dear friend of Miss Ainsworth's," Blake answered slowly, his eyes drifting away. "You see, she is going on at once with her to Rome. Didn't I tell you Miss Ainsworth was seeking the play for her?"

"Seeking a play for Clarice Clare?" I groaned.

"Yes," he replied. "Miss Ainsworth, since leaving the stage, has become the most celebrated dramatic agent we have."

Then I saw the whole thing in a new light. I became desperate.

"Can't they take my play along with them?" I urged. "You know Miss Ainsworth so well, surely she will listen to you?"

My voice took on a pleading tone; my pride was all in tatters.

"When she asked to read your play it was—"

He was cut off directly by a hearty slap on his shoulder, and he turned to greet a friend who had just boarded the ship.

I choked back the feeling of bitter disappointment with an effort. Everything was against me. I had lost through my fool mistake, and now I would have no chance to place the play.

I turned to the thought of the blond actress in desperation. She might do. When Blake gave me his attention again I asked in tremulous voice:

"Is the blond young? She might lace herself and do for the part?"

"Whom do you mean?" queried Blake.

"I mean the other actress, the one who came aboard with Carice Clare."

"Oh, she's been working on a new play her manager secured for her two weeks ago," Blake replied in a preoccupied manner.

His whole bearing was so cheerfully nonchalant that I could have throttled him.

"What are our chances, anyhow?" I asked despairingly. "Do you know of any other likely market?"

"Would you like to meet the young ladies?" he inquired suddenly, in that absent-minded way of his. "Clarice is so anxious to meet you."

"Clarice anxious to meet me!" I cried.

What could it mean? Was he playing with me? I never could entirely understand Blake.

But I jumped up with alacrity and accepted his invitation. I met her, and we chatted for a moment. I found her as interesting mentally as she was beautiful physically. The thought that in an hour or less she would pass out of my knowledge oppressed me more than I can tell. What a fool I had been!

With her as interpreter I could have climbed to the topmost pinnacle of fame. But I had put my foot in it by not letting Miss Ainsworth read the play.

I could plainly see it a failure from that moment. No one else should play her part. I could see that I had written it unconsciously for her alone.

I would return to America on the next boat, cremate the manuscript, and buy an urn for the ashes. It would be a melancholy trophy of defeat.

Alice Ainsworth interrupted my thoughts.

"I want to tell you how much I appreciate the vigor and originality of your play," she said.

"My play?" I echoed blankly.

"I was telling Miss Ainsworth," Blake interrupted suavely, "how lucky it was I happened to remove the manuscript from your trunk just before you lost the key. I wanted to have it ready for her to read."

"Providential!" ejaculated Miss Ainsworth.

I was done for. I began to see everything clearly, and hardly heard Miss Ainsworth as she continued:

"I have been so besieged with plays and fawned upon by playwrights extolling their wares since I left the stage, and took up dramatic-agent work, that it has been a pleasure to meet an entirely unique specimen. I intended absolutely to know no one on board the boat, but Mr. Blake's ginger—which saved my life," she laughingly asserted—"was an 'open sesame.' I couldn't resist it.

"When he brought me your marked copy of Hemans, he introduced to me your personality," she went on. "Your indifference as a salesman was so noticeable that it piqued my curiosity; but when you calmly ignored my wants to the extent of locking up your play and losing the key, I simply had to read it."

"But, Miss Ainsworth, I—"

"Yes," she interrupted. "I know it was not malice aforethought. Fortunately, Mr. Blake had thwarted your mishap, so that I was able to read the play and accept it for Clarice. I am to manage her myself this season. Perhaps Mr. Blake has told you?"

"No; Mr. Blake has told me nothing," I cried, afire with the great good news, and looking at him in my most accusing manner.

"But I didn't see you for any length of time," he protested, in that vague way of his. "Besides, I don't like to discuss business details. You know it all now."

Alice Ainsworth turned to her friend at this juncture and remarked, with keen enthusiasm:

"It is the play of plays. It fits you so well it might have been written expressly for you, Clarice."

"It was," I asserted boldly.

When I managed to get a moment to myself I rested my dizzy head in my cold palms and reflected.

Why had I never understood the thing before? It was so simple now. Alice Ainsworth didn't want a play for herself, but for her goddess of a friend, Clarice Clare.

I cursed Blake for refusing to talk over the details, and taking for granted that I knew everything. I blamed him for his absent-mindedness. Then I thought things all over again; and realizing, as he explained to me later, that he thought I knew Miss Ainsworth was looking for a play for her friend, not herself, I could not find it in my heart to take any exception to his actions.

He had taken the play from my trunk before I locked it, so as to have it ready at the first opportunity. It seemed so simple now, but I had to drive the facts into my brain repeatedly before I could fully understand.

HIS HANDICAP MATE.*

By BERTRAM LEBHAR,

Author of "Wanted By Uncle Sam," "When a Man's Hungry," "The Isle of Mysteries," etc.

How a big salary for light work led to a marriage in haste, followed by a collapse of fortune and a desperate struggle against odds.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

DAN HATHAWAY leaves college and comes to New York to earn his own living. On the train he meets a remarkable old woman, who looks to be about seventy, but is garbed like a girl of seventeen. She takes a great fancy to him. On arriving in the city Dan gets a letter offering him a position where light work receives large pay. On the strength of his salary Dan marries Kate Dunne, a sweetheart of childhood days. The night of his marriage he again encounters the strange old lady, who, on hearing of his marriage, flies into a fit of rage.

The next day he loses his position, being given no reason for his peremptory dismissal. He is left penniless in the big city with not only himself but a wife to support.

Misfortune continues, for his boarding-house burns down. While breaking through the fire-lines to go to his wife's rescue, Dan is arrested and fined ten dollars, which he pays by selling his suit-case and all its contents. He and Kate seek immediate work, but both are unsuccessful, while their attempts to borrow money are also futile.

The two are reduced to going to Madison Square Park to spend the night, but are aroused from their slumber by rain.

CHAPTER XI.

NO PLACE TO SLEEP.

DAN was not guilty of any exaggeration. While Kate slept on, black clouds had gathered suddenly out of a perfectly clear sky.

Then a big raindrop had fallen upon Dan's upturned face, and he was barely able to stifle an exclamation of alarm as he realized the fresh misfortune which threatened them.

"Jumping Jupiter! I hope it isn't going to rain," he muttered. "That would just be about the limit of human endurance."

But another drop fell, and then another. They began to follow each other in rapid-fire succession. Dan glanced apprehensively at the golden head resting so snugly on his shoulder, and saw that it was receiving its full share of the liquid drops.

He took off his hat and held it over his sleeping wife's face; but pretty soon it was raining in torrents, raining so furiously that even a real umbrella would have afforded scant protection.

Still Kate did not awaken. The poor girl was so very, very tired that her slumbers were proof even against this cold, unpleasant downpour.

Her husband hesitated to arouse her, realizing how very badly she needed sleep; but when he saw that they were both soaking wet, he realized that it would be arrant folly for them to stay there any longer.

They must seek shelter at once. He awakened his wife as gently as possible. Where they were to go he hadn't the slightest idea; but they must go somewhere—anywhere to get out of this relentless rain-storm.

Kate was not long in coming to her senses. As soon as she comprehended the situation she sprang hurriedly to her feet.

"Dear me!" she gasped, "we must get into some doorway at once. We shall both catch our death of cold if we stay out in this rain any longer. Gracious, what a storm! I never saw it rain so fast before. It's coming down like a sheet of water. Let's run, Dannie."

* *Began September* ARGOSY. *Single copies, 10 cents.*

Dan took his wife's hand, and they ran out of the park and into the doorway of a near-by office building.

Here they waited for half an hour, at the end of which time the rain ceased with extraordinary suddenness.

"Seems to be all over now," growled Dan. "Of course, now that it's done us about all the harm it can do, it doesn't care to keep it up any longer, confound it!"

Kate tried to smile, but instead her teeth chattered. The rain-storm, brief as it had been, had brought in its wake a fall of several degrees in the temperature. This, combined with her wet clothing, caused the poor girl to shiver in a manner which alarmed her husband.

"Great Heavens, Kitty, you're sick!" he cried in horror. "Your teeth are chattering as though you had an ague. You've got to have food and a proper bed right away, if I have to commit highway robbery to get them for you."

"No, no," protested Kate, "I'm all right. I'm just a little bit cold, that's all. Standing cramped up here in this doorway has chilled me. I'll be all right, now that the rain has stopped and we can walk around. Let's take a walk, Dannie, and I'll soon get my blood in circulation again."

"But you can't walk around all night in your wet things. You'll be a candidate for a hospital by morning, if you attempt it," expostulated her husband.

"Great guns!" he added excitedly; "talking about hospitals, I've got a glorious idea. I think I see a way to get you food, dry clothing, and a refreshing sleep in a very short time."

"How?" inquired the girl, making no attempt to disguise her eagerness.

"Well, you're sick and need medical attention. What's the matter with hailing the first policeman we meet and asking him to summon an ambulance for you? I understand the hospitals in this city are conducted in first-class style.

"The ambulance surgeon will come and take you to the hospital and put you in a nice bed and give you all the nourishment you require. You can stay there for a couple of days, and in the meantime I'll hustle around and try to land a job by the time you come out. Doesn't that plan appeal to you, honey?"

"No," replied Kate firmly. "It doesn't appeal to me at all, Dannie; and, what's more, I'm not going to do any such thing. I'm not sick, and I won't go to a hospital. I won't be separated from you. We're going to stick together and fight this out side by side, Dannie."

"But you really *are* sick, Kitty. It's no use trying to deny it when your teeth are chattering so all the time. Listen to reason, like a good girl.

"We can't go back to the park now; the rain has made the seats too wet, and, if you walk around all night in your wet clothes, your condition will be really serious in a few hours. It's highly necessary that you get food and shelter at once, and a hospital seems the only solution of the problem."

"No, it isn't the only solution," cried Kate excitedly. "I've also got an inspiration, Dannie—and it's a better one than yours. Why, goodness gracious, what a goose I've been not to think of it before.

"We're not homeless at all, Dannie. We've got a nice, comfortable apartment all waiting for us, and I was forgetting all about it. How stupid of me! We'll go there at once."

"Go where?" asked the surprised Dan, half fearing that his wife was beginning to grow delirious.

"Why, to my studio, of course. I can't understand why I didn't remember it before now. I haven't given up the key, and, consequently, I've still got possession of the room, even if I do owe six months' rent. We'll go there right away and live there comfortably until our luck turns."

"That's not a bad idea," declared Dan enthusiastically. "I, also, never gave your studio a thought. If only we'd remembered it a little earlier, Kitty, we could have saved ourselves this soaking."

"Well, at any rate, we'll be able to exchange these wet things for dry ones," said Kate. "I've got some old clothes up there—they were too shabby to bring away, and that's why I left them. And I've got a nice long, purple kimono, which you can wear, Dannie. I guess you'll look sort of funny in a purple kimono; but there won't be anybody there to see, and it will at least be more comfortable than your wet clothes."

"Didn't leave anything to eat up there, by any chance, did you?" inquired Dan wistfully.

"No," sighed Kate. "Not a crumb, I'm sorry to say. And, alas, there isn't anything left which we can turn into money, either. I've already pawned everything of any value."

"How about that purple kimono you just mentioned?" inquired the desperate Dan. "If there's any chance of converting it into the price of a meal at the sign of the three brass balls, I assure you, girlie, that I'd sooner eat it than wear it."

Kate shook her head.

"Abandon that hope, my boy. I tried to get fifty cents on it the other day, and the horrid pawn-broker said it wasn't worth even a nickel to him. No, Dan, I'm afraid we'll have to go hungry to-night; but still we'll have a roof over our heads and a comfortable place to sleep, and that will be a whole lot, won't it?"

They walked to the studio building as fast as they could, and climbed the seven pairs of dirty stairs to Kate's quarters on the top floor.

As they ascended, the odors of spaghetti, chop-suey, garlic, and bad tobacco, which Dan had noted on his first visit to the place, relentlessly assailed their nostrils.

But, whereas, on his previous visit these odors had disgusted Dan almost to the point of nausea, on this occasion he sniffed ecstatically and became almost frantic with envy and desire.

To a man as hungry as he was, even the smell of garlic was savory; and, as for the fumes of chop-suey and spaghetti —they well-nigh intoxicated him.

"I wonder if we couldn't persuade those people to give us some of that food," he whispered to Kate as they climbed the stairs. "I've always understood that Bohemians were generous folks."

"Well, the folks in this building are not very generous," replied Kate. "Besides, I must confess that I'm not very popular with my neighbors, my dear. When I first came here some of the men tenants tried to be friendly; but I was all alone in the world and had to be on my guard, and so I repulsed their advances, which, of course, angered them. The few female tenants are mean old maids, and it was not long before I was on the outs with them, too—somehow or other I never could get along with my own sex, anyway. For some time past the whole bunch have let me severely alone—treated me with disdain, in fact —and I would rather die than let any of them know that I was hungry or in need."

"Well, under those circumstances, it is out of the question to borrow food from any of them, of course," said Dan; but he could not repress a sigh of disappointment.

When they arrived at the door of Kate's studio she turned the key in the lock; but, greatly to her surprise, the door did not open.

"What's the matter?" inquired Dan. "Let me try it," but his efforts were equally unsuccessful. The key turned in the lock, all right; but the door stubbornly refused to budge.

Then Kate uttered an exclamation of mingled astonishment and dismay.

"See here," she cried, "somebody has put a padlock outside the door. This must be the work of that horrid janitor."

She pointed to a couple of stout staples which had been screwed into the woodwork, and which were joined together by a formidable-looking padlock.

"Oh, dear!" she cried, tears of disappointment in her eyes. "I guess we won't be able to have the studio, after all, Dannie. That mean janitor has dispossessed me."

"The nerve of the scoundrel!" growled Dan. "Shall I go down-stairs and wring his neck?"

"No. That would do no good. After all, I suppose he was instructed to do this by the landlord. I owe six months' rent, you know, and the hard-hearted man threatened to put me out unless I paid it all to-day. It's very evident he was in dead earnest, and has kept his word. I'm afraid we'll have to try to find some other place."

Dan tugged furiously at the padlock, thinking he might be able to dislodge it; but the staples were too stout and too firmly screwed into the woodwork to make this feat possible without tools.

"I think I could break the door in,

if I put my shoulder to it," he suggested. "How about it, Kitty?"

Kate shook her head.

"No; the door is very strong. I think you'd only hurt your shoulder if you tried it. And, besides, if you succeeded, the janitor probably would hear the crash and come up-stairs and have you arrested. You can't afford to be taken to court twice in one day, Dannie."

"I feel desperate enough for anything," growled her husband. "I'm getting to a state where prison-bars have no terrors for me. You've got to have a place to sleep, and that's all there is to it."

"Well, we'll have to seek it elsewhere. We can't stay here a minute longer," declared Kate firmly. "There are other studios on this floor, and some of the tenants may hear us out here and discover our predicament.

"I'd rather tramp the streets for the rest of the night than have any of the horrid people in this building learn of the straits I'm in. I know that they'd just gloat over my misfortunes. There's a mean old-maid portrait painter in that studio there across the hall. She and I hate each other like poison, and she'd be tickled to death to hear of this.

"I guess she's in there now, and she's liable to pop her head out of her door any minute and discover us here. Let's hurry away, Dannie."

"All right, little girl," rejoined Dan, and they descended the seven flights of stairs as noiselessly as possible.

"I've got a good idea," Dan announced, after they had reached the street. "It may not work, but it's worth trying at least."

"What is it?" asked Kate eagerly.

"Well, you know the first night I arrived here I put up at the Mills Hotel on Thirty-Sixth Street. The clerk there knows I landed that forty-dollar-a-week job at the Marathon Hotel, and I don't suppose he knows that I have lost it.

"We'll go there and get him to put us up for the night on credit. I know that they don't usually extend credit there; but, inasmuch as he thinks I'm still in possession of a good lucrative job, he'll probably be willing to make an exception in our case."

"Yes. The plan is well worth trying," Kate agreed. "Perhaps you will also be able to persuade the clerk to give us our breakfast on credit to-morrow morning. Wouldn't that be heavenly? Let's hurry, Dannie. Thirty-Sixth Street is quite a few blocks from here; but, no matter, I shall enjoy the walk."

Kate was feeling much better now. Her teeth had stopped chattering, and her complexion had lost its alarming bluish tint. The walk from Madison Square Park to the studio building had brought about this improvement; but in her rain-soaked, crumpled clothes she still presented a pitiable enough appearance.

So, also, did her unhappy husband. The shower had played sad havoc with his attire. Even the best-dressed man will look pretty seedy after being caught in a heavy rain-storm.

His coat, which until a brief hour ago had fitted him most becomingly, now hung on him like a wet sack; and his trousers, robbed by the rain of any vestige of a crease, clung to his long legs most distressingly, while his broken derby hat and the growth of beard which was beginning to show on his face—for he had been in the habit of shaving every day—added greatly to his desperate appearance.

As the unfortunate couple entered the lobby of the Mills Hotel, arm in arm, the clerk behind the desk looked at them suspiciously.

Not until Dan spoke did he recognize in him the young man who had looked so spick and span when he had last seen him, and who had been lucky enough to land a forty-dollar-a-week hotel job the first day of his arrival in New York.

"Hallo, old man!" exclaimed Dan heartily. "I'm mighty glad you're on the job. I was afraid that it might be your night off, and that some other chap whom I don't know would be on duty. I want you to do me a great favor. By the way—I am forgetting—let me introduce you to Mrs. Dan Hathaway."

The clerk acknowledged this introduction with a polite bow.

"We want you to give us a room for the night, old chap," went on Dan. "We've had a fire in our boarding-house perhaps you've heard about it—and haven't any other place to go. I'm

afraid that I can't pay you in advance, but you can safely trust me."

"Well, even if you could pay me, it wouldn't make any difference," exclaimed the clerk. "I couldn't give you a room. Why, my dear fellow, don't you know that we don't take ladies here? This hotel is strictly for men only. I thought everybody in New York knew that."

"*I* didn't know it!" gasped Dan. "Good Heavens, this is an awful disappointment! I felt so sure that you would accommodate us. We've been caught in the rain, and our clothing is soaking wet, as you can see."

"I'm awfully sorry," declared the clerk sympathetically. "I'd gladly help you out if I could. Why not try some other hotel?"

"I will," said Dan, "if you will be kind enough to loan me a couple of dollars. I haven't got a cent, and, of course, no other hotel would take us unless we paid in advance. That's why we came here."

"I'm sorry, but I'm clean broke myself," was the disappointing reply. "I always *am* broke by this time of the week. Our salaries here ain't very big, you know. They don't pay the kind of wages here that they give you fellows at the Marathon.

"By the way," the clerk added with an air of surprise, "why on earth don't you go to the Marathon? Inasmuch as you are employed there they ought to be willing to trust you for the price of a room. They can charge it up against your salary, you know."

"I'm no longer employed at the Marathon," groaned Dan, driven by despair into making this admission. "I lost my job there this morning. Everything is going wrong with me. I'm the most unlucky fellow that ever was born."

"Lost your job!" exclaimed the clerk in great surprise. "Lost your forty-dollar-a-week job, eh? Gee-whiz! that's too bad. How did you happen to lose it?"

"I don't know. I lost it just as mysteriously as I obtained it. I couldn't tell you why they gave it to me, and I'm equally unable to tell you why they took it away from me. It's a mystery that I hope to solve some day; but I'm not in the mood to bother about mysteries now. The only problem that I care to solve at present is how to get lodging and food for my wife and myself. Can't you help us, old man? For Heaven's sake, do something for us."

"I'm afraid I can't do anything for you," replied the clerk. "So you've lost your job at the Marathon, eh? You don't happen to know whether they still need anybody to take your place, do you? If so, I guess I'll apply for the position myself. I don't see why I shouldn't get it. I've had lots of experience in the hotel business. This isn't the only job I've held, you know. I've worked in some good hotels in my day. I was room-clerk for five years at the—"

He stopped abruptly, suddenly realizing that he was talking to himself. Dan had strode angrily out of the hotel, with Kate in his wake.

"Well, of all the rude, unfriendly fellows, that chap's the worst," muttered the clerk in astonishment. "He might have been decent enough to put me wise as to whether that job at the Marathon is still vacant."

"Of all the selfish, unsympathetic brutes, that hotel-clerk is about the limit!" growled Dan to Kate as they stood on the sidewalk, outside. "Instead of trying to help us, he actually had the nerve to seek to make capital out of my misfortune. I honestly believe he was glad to hear that I had lost that job at the Marathon. Did you notice the eager, hungry look on his face when I told him about it?"

"Well, I guess in this town everybody is looking out for number one," replied Kate with a shrug of her shoulders. "I've heard people in a position to know declare that New York is the most selfish city in the world, and I believe they're right.

"We can't expect sympathy while we're down on our luck. 'Laugh and the world laughs with you; weep and you weep alone,' you know, Dannie. It's the way of the world in general, and of New York in particular. It's no use feeling bitter about it, my dear. We must take things philosophically, and hope for better days."

"Better days?" groaned Dan, now too pessimistic to heed this advice. "I

can't see any sign of better days. I begin to have a feeling that things are going to get worse and worse with us, instead of better."

"No, they're not. Don't be so foolish, Dan. Why, I declare you make me quite ashamed of you!" exclaimed Kate severely.

"Supposing we do have to spend the rest of this night promenading the street?" she went on. "It's past midnight now, so we don't have many hours to wait until it's daybreak. I can stand it, and surely you ought to be able to bear it if I can.

"When day comes, we'll start our search for work again—you going in one direction and I in the other, the same as we did yesterday. Maybe one of us will be lucky enough to land something to-day; and even if we don't, we ought to hear from your friend Tom Riker by ten o'clock this morning. No doubt he'll respond nobly to your appeal, and send you quite a nice little sum of money."

"I hope he does," sighed Dan, still a prey to the most profound melancholy. "I greatly fear, though, that that money will arrive too late. We shall both be dead of starvation and exposure before it gets here."

His plucky little wife was about to reply soothingly to this pessimistic utterance when she was startled by a sudden, sharp exclamation from Dan, followed by a deep groan of anguish.

"What's the matter, dear?" she inquired apprehensively. "Are you ill?"

"Oh, dear me," groaned her husband. "This is awful! This is the very limit. It's no use struggling against Fate any longer—we might as well give up the fight right now."

"What are you talking about, Dan?" cried Kate impatiently. "For Heaven's sake, tell me what's the matter!"

"The matter is that our evil genius has dealt us another cruel blow, my poor little Kitty, and this time it's a knockout. Give up all hope of receiving any money from Tom Riker, for we're not going to get a cent."

"Why not?" asked his wife in amazement.

"Because in my letter to him I neglected to inform him where to send the money. The thought of it has only just occurred to me. I gave him no address, and without an address, how is he going to communicate with us? Our last hope has failed. Did you ever hear of such rotten luck?"

CHAPTER XII.

THE COURAGE OF DESPAIR.

It was some minutes before Kate rallied from the shock of her husband's announcement.

It was a terrible disappointment to learn that it was no longer possible to expect that money to arrive within the next few hours.

She had not entertained the slightest doubt that Tom Riker would respond to her husband's appeal; for Dan had told her what a good fellow his former roommate was, and how he could be relied upon in such an emergency.

Being a very practical girl, she had figured out the exact hour at which they might expect the money. She had assumed that Riker would get Dan's letter by the first morning mail delivery.

The first delivery at Barrow, according to Dan, was at 8 A.M. It would take Riker about an hour to go among his and Dan's friends, explaining the situation to them and borrowing all the money he could.

In his letter, Dan had requested Riker to send on the money by telegraph. Therefore, if Dan had not carelessly neglected to state his address, they, in all probability, would have been in receipt of the money by half past nine or, at the very latest, ten o'clock that morning.

That would have meant a hearty meal and probably money enough besides to enable them to stop at a good boarding-house for at least a week.

Kate, although she had had nothing to eat all the preceding day, and was sadly enervated by exposure and lack of sleep, had kept up bravely until now, because she had been fortified and encouraged by the conviction that the end of their sufferings was in plain sight.

Now she was seized with despair, and with the knowledge that she could no longer hope to break her long fast

within a few hours came a sudden, poignant realization of the fact that she was starving and so weak that she could scarcely stand.

She made a feeble effort to fight back the tears of weakness and disappointment that welled into her eyes; but it was no use. She simply could not help weeping, even though she knew that the sight of her tears was driving her unhappy husband almost frantic.

"Don't cry, Kitty, please; don't, little girl," he pleaded. "Reproach me for my infernal carelessness. Upbraid me for not being able to support you. Be as angry with me as you like—I realize that I richly deserve it—but please don't cry so piteously. I simply can't bear to hear you."

His distress was so great that at length the unselfish and tender-hearted Kate conquered her own emotion and, hastily drying her eyes, turned to him soothingly.

"Don't you care, Dannie," she said gently. "Don't mind my tears, old boy. It often does me good to have a cry, and I really don't mean anything by it. I'm a silly little goose! See, dear, I'm quite myself again now. You sha'n't hear another whimper from me, I promise you. And as for reproaching you for your carelessness, I should like to see myself doing anything of the sort.

"Why, I am just as much to blame as you. I was looking over your shoulder when you wrote that letter to Mr. Riker, and I ought to have noticed that you didn't give him any address. We were both guilty of carelessness; but then we were both so much excited that it is easy to understand how we overlooked such a detail—important though it was."

"It's awfully good of you to put it that way, girlie," declared Dan gratefully, "and I can't tell you how much I admire and honor you for your pluck. Your tears were quite unnerving me, and if you had kept them up, I think I should have gone crazy."

"Well, I'm all right again now," replied Kate, with a brave attempt at a smile. "It's no use crying over spilled milk. The task before us now is to decide what is best to be done under the circumstances."

"What *can* we do?" demanded Dan with a sigh. "We're just about as badly off as if we had never sent that letter to Tom Riker. He can't send us any money, if he doesn't know where to send it to."

"Well, maybe he'll have sense enough to send it to the main office of the telegraph company," exclaimed Kate, clapping her hands with delight at this sudden, happy thought. "Come to think of it, Dannie, that's a pretty good idea. That's probably just exactly what your friend will do.

"When he finds that you've given him no address, he'll naturally conclude that you wish him to wire the money to the main office. We've been making a whole lot of fuss over nothing. The situation isn't nearly as bad as we supposed."

"By Jove, you're right!" cried Dan joyously. "I never thought of that. You've got a wonderful head, Kitty. Of course, that's just what Tom will do. He's bound to think of it. He's a pretty sensible chap and the most devoted friend that ever was, and he won't let a little thing like the lack of an address prevent him from sending the money when he reads how badly I need it.

"He'll be puzzled for a few minutes, and then the idea of sending the money to the main New York office will, of course, occur to him, as it has occurred to you. What an idiot and a brute I am to have alarmed you so! We'll probably have that money in our possession by ten o'clock. By the way, I wonder where the main office of the telegraph company is located?"

"'Way down-town, I believe," replied Kate.

"Well, how are we going to get there? We haven't got car fare, and we can't walk all that distance. Guess we're foiled once more — and for the lack of a paltry, insignificant dime!" exclaimed Dan disgustedly.

But Kate, now fully in possession of her nerve and good spirits again, merely smiled at this rueful remark.

"Why, Dannie, what a slow-witted goose you are getting to be," she said reproachfully. "You used to be such a resourceful chap, too, I remember,

when we were kids. Have you forgotten the day you stole your father's best hat to make me a cage for my white mice? You were full of ideas in those days, and now you don't seem to have any.

"Why, my dear boy, doesn't it occur to you that we don't have to go down-town at all. We can go to that branch office, where we sent that telegram, and ask the man there to be kind enough to call up the main office on the wire and inquire if the money is there for us, and, if so, either have them re-telegraph it up-town or else borrow car fare from the man. Of course he'll be willing to loan it to us after he has ascertained that that money is really waiting for us down-town."

"Right you are, my wonderful little wife!" exclaimed Dan. "Of course, that's exactly what we'll do. You're perfectly right, too, in calling me a slow-witted goose. That's much too mild a term to use. My brain seems to have stopped working altogether. I guess it's because my head is so full of worry."

"Well, you must not worry, dear. Everything will come out all right in the end. I feel sure of it," declared Kate.

"I wouldn't care if I had only myself to look out for," sighed Dan. "Despite the rough deal I'm getting, I honestly believe that I could laugh at all these reverses and mishaps if I were the only one to suffer; but it's the agonizing knowledge that a dainty, delicate little creature like yourself, who should be clad in silks and satins and living on the fat of the land, is—"

"Stop! Stop!" cried Kate imperatively, clapping her hand over his mouth. "I won't hear another word on that subject, sir. You've said all that before, you know, and I've tried to make you see how foolish you are to worry yourself about me.

"Of course, if what you *really* mean is that you'd be able to get along all right if you were all by yourself, and weren't handicapped in the struggle by having to look out for a helpless girl in addition, why I heartily agree with you and—"

"You know very well that I don't mean anything of the sort," cried Dan indignantly; and, in order to chase any doubts on the subject from his wife's mind, he immediately assumed an air of gaiety and optimism, and soon had Kate laughing at his jests with much apparent merriment.

It is pretty hard for a young man to joke when not a morsel of food has passed his lips for hours. It is even more difficult for a girl to laugh at such jokes and assume a blithe air of merriment when she is in reality almost ready to drop with starvation and exhaustion; but this pair managed to achieve this feat.

For the next few hours, which they spent in promenading the streets—having no other means of passing away the time until daybreak—they kept up this brave show of good spirits and laughed at the merest trifles with such hilarity that once, when they passed a policeman on Seventh Avenue, the latter glanced at the couple suspiciously, and appeared half inclined to place them under arrest as intoxicated persons.

There was much about the appearance of Dan and Kate to warrant the policeman's suspicions that they were under the influence of liquor.

Kate, who had hold of her husband's arm, was so weak, poor girl, that she swayed perceptibly as she walked. The noisy laugh in which she was indulging was, of course, two-thirds hysteria; but it sounded exactly like the mirth of a woman who has partaken of too much strong drink.

As for Dan, his broken derby hat and his crumpled clothes, combined with the fact that he reeled at frequent intervals—for an empty stomach often has the effect of making a man unsteady on his feet—seemed to point conclusively to the fact that he was inebriated.

"A rowdy couple," muttered the officer to himself. "The girl looks as if she hasn't been long at that sort of life, too. There are still some traces of refinement about her face. Guess her rascally companion has dragged her down to what she is."

He followed them resolutely for several blocks, still undecided whether or not he should take them to the station-house; but finally he made up his mind that, although they were undoubtedly

drunk, they seemed able to take care of themselves, and, so, mercifully gave them the benefit of the doubt.

CHAPTER XIII.

A PROUD BEGGAR.

AT seven o'clock that morning Kate remarked to her husband in a faint voice: "Dannie, dear, why should we go hungry any longer? Let us step into that restaurant across the street and ask them to give us some food. Surely the proprietor won't be so cruel as to refuse."

Now, the thought of going into some restaurant and begging food for his wife and himself had more than once occurred to Dan, but he had fiercely dismissed it from his mind without even mentioning the subject to Kate.

He possessed a proud spirit, and the idea of begging for something to eat was so repellent to him that he felt that, as far as he himself was concerned, he would rather die from starvation than suffer such humiliation.

But now that Kate had made the suggestion, he realized that he was guilty of extreme selfishness in allowing his pride to stand in the way of procuring for her the nourishment she so greatly needed.

"All right," he agreed, "let's go over there, girlie, and see if we can't persuade them to give us a good breakfast. We can assure the proprietor that we will pay for it as soon as we get our money."

The restaurant at which Kate had pointed a shaking finger was a cheap "quick-lunch" place.

The patrons sat on high stools arranged around a circular counter. The manager—a thin, clean-shaven little man—sat behind the cashier's desk near the front.

Dan addressed himself to this man in a low tone, for there were several customers in the place, and he shrank from being overheard by them.

"My wife and I are desirous of purchasing breakfast," he said. "By a mere accident, I find myself financially embarrassed — only temporarily so, of course. If you will be good enough to trust us for the price of a meal, I promise that we will pay every cent of our bill before many hours have passed."

This lofty speech might have had the desired effect upon the manager if it had not been for the fact that the man's gaze chanced to rest on Dan's broken derby hat.

Dan's line of talk and the broken derby did not go together at all well, in this man's opinion.

If Dan had humbly begged for food for his wife and himself, he might have got it, for the restaurant manager was not at all hard-hearted; but the shabby young man's talk about being "by a mere accident financially embarrassed," and his promise to settle the bill within a few hours, struck the manager as such an impudent bluff that he pointed angrily to the door.

"Get out," he shouted, "or I'll have you both arrested for a couple of beggars. Get out, I say, or I'll call a cop. We don't give meals on credit here, and, even if we did, I ain't so easy as to be fooled by such folks as you."

Dan's hot temper arose at this rude rebuff, and he would have retorted fiercely and probably would have precipitated a physical combat if Kate had not tugged frantically at his arm and whispered to him beseechingly to leave the place at once and not make a scene, for her sake.

Dan allowed his wife to lead him to the sidewalk. Then she diplomatically stemmed the current of his wrath by beginning to laugh with apparent heartiness.

"I can't see anything to laugh at," growled her indignant husband. "This is a grand city to be broke in. You see how people get treated when they politely beg for food."

"But you didn't go about it in the right way," declared Kate, still keeping up the pretense of laughter. "Why, bless me, Dannie, boy, you asked for food in a tone that was almost patronizing. That is what made that man so mad, I guess.

"Of course, he didn't believe you when you said you intended to pay later. Why should he? I guess we don't look exactly like millionaires in our present get-up.

"We must try another restaurant. I didn't like the looks of that place, anyway. I'll wager the food they serve there is most unpalatable; so it's just as well

our request was refused. We'll try another place, and I'll do the talking this time. You're too proud to make a successful beggar."

A few blocks farther on they found another "quick-lunch" restaurant — a larger and more pretentious place than the first.

Here Kate prevailed upon her husband to allow her to be the spokesman.

"My husband and I are half-starved," she said to the manager in a plaintive tone. "If you would be kind enough to give us something to eat, we should appreciate it so much, and perhaps some day we shall be able to repay you for your kindness."

Dan, who was standing by Kate's side, frowned at her words. His wife was pleading for food in the tone of a professional beggar. His proud spirit rebelled at the humiliation of it.

"I want you to understand, sir, that we are not by any means beggars," he broke in fiercely. "We are without funds just at present, but we expect to receive a whole lot of money in an hour or so."

The restaurant manager, a man with a very kind face, had been so much moved by Kate's plaintive plea that he was on the point of taking them back to the kitchen and instructing the chef to give them all the food they could eat. But, at Dan's words, he abruptly changed his mind, and the sympathetic expression disappeared.

"Expect a whole lot of money in an hour or so," he sneered, his keen glance taking in every detail of Dan's broken hat, soiled linen, and crumpled clothing. "Well, in that case, I guess you had better wait until you get it. Come back then, and I'll gladly give you all the food you can *pay* for."

"If only you had not spoken!" sighed Kate, fighting hard to keep back her tears, as they reached the sidewalk again, still unfed. "I feel positive he was going to give us something to eat; but you spoiled it all by telling him about that money."

"I only told him the truth," declared Dan, in self-defense.

"I know you did, but we couldn't expect him to believe it. He thought you were trying to deceive him, of course. The next place we go to, Dannie, boy, please, *please* let me do all the talking. You must keep perfectly still and refrain from saying a single word, like a dear boy."

They did not have to walk far before they came to another restaurant. This, also, was a quick-lunch place. The neighborhood seemed to be liberally supplied with establishments which catered to the wants of those who desired to eat in a hurry.

Here Kate repeated her plaintive plea for food, and Dan, although he smarted under the humiliation of having to stand by and hear his wife adopt the tone of a mendicant, managed by a desperate effort to refrain from uttering a word.

"So you want food, eh?" exclaimed the restaurant proprietor, closely surveying Kate from head to foot. "Well, young woman, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll give you and your husband all you want to eat, and I'll give you money besides, if you're willing to work for it."

"Of course I am," replied Kate eagerly, without even waiting to consult Dan. "Your proposition is perfectly fair. We don't ask for charity. I'm willing to do any kind of honest work."

"Well, I'm in need of a waitress. One of my girls has quit me all of a sudden, and I'm short-handed. I sort of like your looks, young woman, and I'm inclined to give you the job if you want it."

"See here," cried Dan, unable to keep silent any longer, "my wife isn't cut out for a waitress. Can't you see that she is a lady? She couldn't think of accepting your offer. But what's the matter with giving me the job, old chap. I don't mind working as a waiter for you."

The restaurant-keeper shook his head.

"No. I don't employ any men waiters in this place. I find that waitresses are much more profitable. Most of my customers are young men, and they like to have their pie and coffee and ham and beans served by a young woman. A pretty waitress is a great drawing-card in a place like this.

"Young men get stuck on her, and get to buying food in a most reckless fashion as a consequence. Now, I like your wife's looks," the man continued, directing a glance of unconcealed admiration at Kate.

"She's got a real pretty face and a smart figger. Her clothes ain't much to look at, but with her first week's salary she could buy a red shirt-waist or something of that sort and look real stunning.

"She'd do well here. She'd get a whole lot of tips. Some of the young men that eat here are very generous in that respect, and if she is smart and jollies them along—sort of flirts with them, so to speak—she can—"

"You've said enough," growled Dan, advancing toward the restaurant proprietor with murder in his eye. "If you dare to say another word in that strain, you insulting loafer, I'll give you a thrashing you won't forget in a hurry."

The restaurant man darted behind the desk and, hastily pulling open a drawer, took therefrom a revolver, which he leveled at Dan.

"I'm not afraid of you," he remarked coolly. "I keep this gun here in readiness for just such bullies as you. It's fully loaded, and if you attempt to lay a hand on me I'll pull the trigger. I ain't insulted the young woman. She said you was both hungry, and I offered her a good job.

"That ain't no insult. Now she couldn't have the job if she begged for it. I can get plenty of girls—better-looking girls than her, too—who'll be glad to take it.

"For a hungry beggar, young man, you give yourself a whole lot of airs. If you're so mighty particular about your wife, why in thunder don't you go to work and support her?"

If it had not been for the revolver pointed straight at his head, Dan would have replied to this taunting speech with his fists; but, mad clean through though he was, he was not quite prepared to commit suicide, and therefore he stood there, helpless.

"Come, dear," whispered Kate in his ear, "a crowd is beginning to gather outside. Let us go. You can't gain anything by wasting any more time on this man. Let us get out of here right away."

A little group had gathered on the sidewalk, and they were looking through the door of the restaurant in open-mouthed astonishment.

Dan turned on his heel, and, taking his wife by the arm, left the place and passed proudly through the curious crowd, followed by a taunting laugh from the restaurant keeper.

This time Kate did not reproach her husband for allowing his hasty temper to spoil their chance of procuring the food they so much needed.

"I guess you were right, Dannie, boy," she said. "That man had an awful nerve to talk to me in that manner. I suppose he meant well enough, though. He really thought he was doing us a favor, I guess, by offering me that job—with a chance to make a whole lot of money on tips by jollying along the generous young pie and coffee consumers. I really don't think, though, I'd care for a job of that sort."

"Of course you wouldn't," declared her husband savagely. "I'd like to see you doing such a thing. That fellow rightly deserved a thrashing for daring to suggest it. I agree with you that he may not have meant any harm; but he ought to have been able to see that you are a lady, even if you are starving and homeless, my poor little Kitty."

"Well, let's forget about him," suggested Kate. "We must make another attempt to get something to eat. Let us hope that we'll be more successful this time."

"Oh, let's not try any more places," pleaded Dan. "What's the use? It's only inviting insults. I'd like to see you have something to eat, Kitty; but I don't like to see you almost go down on your knees in order to get it. The rôle of a beggar is not becoming to you, little girl. Let's wait for another couple of hours. By that time the money from Tom Riker will probably arrive at the telegraph-office, and we shall be able to buy our breakfast without asking any favors. Since you've waited so long, don't you think you can hold out just a little longer?"

"Oh, yes, I can wait," replied Kate. "I guess you're right, Dannie. It's nearly eight o'clock now, and the money ought to be at the telegraph-office by half past nine, or ten at the latest. We can easily hold out until then."

She looked up bravely into her husband's face as she spoke, and Dan did not observe that she held tightly to his arm to prevent herself from falling. She

was feeling pretty weak by now. Tired, outraged nature was beseeching her to give up the struggle and fall in a heap at her husband's feet; but she fiercely fought off the suggestion and rallied with a wonderful effort.

It was quite a few blocks to Madison Square Park, but she managed to accomplish the task of walking there. The park was close by the branch telegraph-office, and it was Dan's plan to sit there until it was time to make inquiry for the expected money.

It was a bright, sunny morning, and the park benches were now quite dry. Kate and Dan sat down with a grateful sigh of relief. Madison Square Park was a much more pleasant spot at nine in the morning than it was at nine at night.

On the previous evening it had presented a marrow-chilling scene of human misery and destitution, with its benches lined with homeless unfortunates. Now well-dressed, prosperous-appearing men and women, and light-hearted children accompanied by spick-and-span, white-aproned nurse-girls, passed the spot where Dan and Kate sat.

More than one curious glance was directed toward the pair, but Dan and his wife heeded them not. They were in no mood to resent the interest they aroused.

Weary and famished, they were glad to sit there, enjoying the grateful warmth of the sunshine and the comfort of the park bench. A big street-clock, situated on the other side of the square, but plainly visible from where they sat, kept them informed of the passing time. They watched this clock with pathetic wistfulness, and when its hands pointed to twenty-five minutes after nine Dan gently assisted Kate to her feet.

"Come, dearie, it is time for us to go to the telegraph-office," he said. "That money ought to have arrived by now."

When they reached the Western Union branch office they were somewhat disappointed to find that the operator with whom they had had dealings on their previous visit had gone off duty. The man who filled his place, a surly sort of fellow, did not know them, and grumbled somewhat when Dan explained matters to him and requested him to communicate with the main office.

However, despite his grumbling, he sat down at his key and despatched the desired query to headquarters. Ten minutes later a reply came ticking over the wire, and the man turned to Dan and Kate, who stood leaning over the counter awaiting his words with intense eagerness.

"No," he said shortly, "they say down there that there ain't any money for you."

"Are you sure?" cried Dan hoarsely. "There must be some mistake."

"Well, I guess the mistake is on your part," retorted the man, with an unsympathetic laugh. "Your friend at Barrow evidently ain't as accommodating as you supposed he'd be. Looks as if he's turned you down cold."

"Good Heavens!" groaned Dan. "I can't imagine Tom Riker failing me. This is a terrible disappointment."

"Don't despair, Dannie," said Kate soothingly. "It's early yet—only a little after half past nine. We really didn't expect that money to arrive until ten o'clock, you know. We'll sit on that bench and wait, if this gentleman has no objection."

The surly operator gave a grudging consent, and, at the end of half an hour, was even accommodating enough to query headquarters again concerning the expected money.

But again he turned to his unhappy visitors with a negative shake of the head.

"No, they say there's nothing there for you," he reported. "I guess you'll find that your friend has handed you a lemon."

"We'll wait a little longer," said the sanguine Kate. "Perhaps Mr. Riker may have had quite some trouble in borrowing the money, and hence the delay. Don't be pessimistic, Dannie—there's hope yet."

"I've left word down at the main office for them to notify me if the money arrives," put in the operator. "I can't be bothered, calling them up every few minutes. If your friend does send the money, they'll let me know over the wire. Why don't you take a walk, and drop in again later?"

"No, we'll wait right here," returned Dan. "You may get word any minute, and we want to be on the spot when it arrives."

They sat there until eleven-thirty, and their hopes grew fainter and fainter as they watched the hands of the office-clock travel.

"Are you sure they'll notify you when that money arrives?" inquired Dan hoarsely. "They may have forgotten to do so, you know."

"No, they haven't forgotten," replied the operator coldly. "If there was any money for you they'd have let me know, all right."

"Won't you please, *please* call them up once more and ask about it?" begged Kate in her most pleading tone. "We'd appreciate it so much, and we promise not to bother you any more."

The man muttered something about some people not caring how much trouble they gave other folks; but he sat down at his despatching-key once more and, for a third time, got in communication with headquarters.

After a long wait, the reply came over the wire, and he turned to the miserable pair.

"They say that there ain't any money for anybody named Hathaway," he snapped, "so that settles it. Remember your promise not to bother me any more. You'd better resign yourselves to the fact that your friend ain't going to send that money. It ain't by any means the first time that a fellow's friend has failed him in his hour of need."

CHAPTER XIV.

THEIR BREAKFAST.

DAN nodded his head in mournful indorsement of the telegraph operator's remark.

"I guess you're right," he groaned. "Tom Riker has failed me in my hour of need. He is not going to send that money. It is foolish to hope any longer. He is a false friend—and I always believed him to be the truest, most devoted fellow on earth," he added with a bitter laugh.

"Most friends are true and devoted—until you ask them for money," retorted the surly cynic behind the counter.

"I suppose *you* wouldn't be willing to loan us a few dollars for a few days, would you, old fellow?" asked Dan.

"You suppose right — I wouldn't," was the cold, crisp reply. "I never loan money to perfect strangers. It's a bad habit to get into."

"But we're *so* hungry," sighed Kate, with a voice so pleading that it might have melted a heart of stone. "We haven't had anything to eat since yesterday morning."

"Well, madam, this ain't a restaurant, you know," replied the man rudely. "There's nothing to eat here, except telegraph-blanks, and I reckon you'd find them mighty poor stuff."

"Don't get fresh," broke in Dan fiercely.

"I'll get just as fresh as I want," retorted the surly operator pugnaciously. "If you're looking for trouble, I'm your man. I've got you sized up right now. You're a couple of hot-touch artists. I don't believe you ever really expected any money from any friend at Barrow. That was all a bluff. I'm on to your game, all right now. You sprang that fake on me in the hope of working on my sympathy and persuading me to stake you to a few dollars. Well, there ain't anything doing, so you might as well beat it."

"Come on, dear," whispered Kate in her husband's ear. "What's the use of wasting words with this rude fellow? He isn't worth talking to. Come on out. I've got a good idea."

"What's your idea, Kitty?" asked Dan as they left the telegraph office.

He spoke without enthusiasm. Even his faith in his little wife's resourcefulness could not make him hopeful now.

"My idea is that we must get something to eat right away. Let's walk over to Sixth Avenue and get breakfast."

"The begging game again, eh?" groaned Dan. "It sickens me to think of having to humble ourselves before some more of those insulting restaurant-keepers; but I suppose there's nothing else for us to do. We've got to have something to eat, and that seems to be our only chance of getting it now."

"No, it isn't," replied Kitty with a provoking air of mystery. "We're not going begging at any more restaurants, Dannie, boy. We're going shopping at the Sixth Avenue department-stores."

"Shopping at the department-stores!"

gasped Dan in amazement. "My poor little girlie! Has starvation and suffering affected your head? How on earth can we go shopping without money?"

"That's where my new idea comes in," replied Kate with a smile. "As a matter of fact, it isn't really a new idea. I read about it in a Sunday newspaper a long while ago; but it had quite slipped my mind until you were trying to borrow money from that rude man in the telegraph office. Then it flashed on me like an inspiration.

"I see prospects of a good substantial breakfast now, Dannie. Let us walk over to Sixth Avenue—it's only a few blocks — and I'll show you how it's done."

The amazed Dan walked by his wife's side, wondering exceedingly what this new plan could be, and still entertaining some fear that their misfortunes had affected Kate's brain.

It did not take them long to reach that part of Sixth Avenue which is known as "the shopping district" because of the number of big department-stores located there.

Kate stopped at the entrance of one of these big stores.

"Let's go in here, Dannie," she whispered. "This will do as well as any of them, I guess. This store does an enormous trade with people of modest incomes, so our shabby appearance won't make us as conspicuous as it would in some of the sweller shops."

"But I don't understand," protested Dan in bewilderment. "Before we enter this place, Kitty, tell me—"

"You'll understand in a few minutes," his wife interrupted. "Before we have breakfast I must seek the ladies' parlor and fix up my hair a bit and make myself look a little more respectable than I do now; and you had better carry your hat in your hand, Dannie, with the broken part held against your coat, so that it won't show. You might find the men's washroom, too, and wash your hands and face, so as to remove some of that 'out-all-night' appearance. We've got to look as respectable as possible, in order to insure the success of my plan."

A little soap and water and a brush and comb worked wonders in improving the appearance of both Dan and Kate.

These conveniences were to be had free in the big department-store, which boasted of the fact that it provided visitors with all the comforts of home, even including a luxuriously fitted writing-room and a playground on the roof where mothers could check their babies, gratis, while they did their shopping.

When Kitty joined her husband again at the elevators on the main floor, her appearance was so much improved that Dan gasped with surprise.

Her wealth of golden hair, which had become quite disheveled during their wanderings, was now neatly and becomingly arranged. She had smoothed out her dress and adjusted her hat at the proper angle.

As for Dan, although he was still badly in need of a shave — free tonsorial services, unfortunately for him, not being one of the accommodations of the store—he had managed to make himself at least half-way presentable by combing his hair, washing his face, and ingeniously turning his soiled linen collar inside out, having made the agreeable discovery that the inner surface was still almost immaculate.

He had also taken his wife's advice about removing his badly broken derby and holding it in his hand.

Both Dan and Kate felt considerably refreshed, too, by these ablutions and renovations. There is nothing like cold water to brace one up, even though one has not tasted food for hours.

Kitty led the way into one of the elevators and bade the man let them off at the grocery department floor, in as commanding a tone as if she and her husband had possessed the wherewithal to purchase half of the store, instead of being on a hunt for a free breakfast.

The grocery department was crowded with people, mostly women, and Dan and Kate had literally to fight their way to a little booth at one side where a strong-voiced man was loudly extolling the merits of a new breakfast-food to a little group gathered around him.

"It is the most easily prepared dish ever placed before thrifty housekeepers," announced the man. "And it is so delicious that, once you have tried it, you will never do without it. You simply take a few spoonfuls of the food, add

milk or cream, as you prefer, and it is all ready to serve."

Suiting the action to the word, he took some of the breakfast-food, placed it in a pretty china plate; and poured some delicious-looking cream over it. Then he handed the dish to a woman in the group, saying, "Kindly taste it, madam, and let me have your candid opinion."

Many women in the crowd announced their desire to pass judgment upon the merits of the article, and received generous portions of the appetizing dish.

Kate was among those who managed to secure a place, and immediately went into raptures concerning the food.

"It's simply delicious, Dannie," she announced in a loud voice. "Try a spoonful, dear? If you like it, I will always keep it in the house."

"Perhaps the gentleman would like to try a plateful himself," spoke up the gratified demonstrator, who had heard Kate's words, which, of course, were intended for his ears.

Dan received a good portion of the delicacy, and the hungry couple ate ravenously, not leaving even a solitary crumb on their plates.

"My husband and I like it very much," said Kate, as she handed back the empty dishes. "I won't order any to-day, but I hope to be back later in the week to purchase several packages."

They passed on to another booth where a polite woman demonstrator was offering free samples of canned peaches.

"We'll take some of these," whispered Kate in Dan's ear. "We really should have come here first of all and partaken of our fruit before we ate our cereal; but we must not mind our breakfast being a little topsyturvy under the circumstances."

A generous portion of preserved peaches, with a liberal supply of delicious juice, was handed out to them, and once more they ate ravenously.

"Good Heavens, Kitty!" gasped Dan as they made their way toward still another booth where a new brand of baked beans was being exploited. "I never imagined that such a thing as this was possible. How can they do it?"

"It's all an advertisement, of course," replied Kate. "These samples don't cost them very much, and they secure lots of orders by their enterprise. Most of the big stores do it, I understand. Let's try some of these beans, Dannie. They look awfully good, don't they?"

They had their portion of crisp baked beans, and they visited several other booths and counters and partook of free portions of such delicacies as potted tongue, anchovy paste on crackers, pumpkin marmalade, chicken salad, canned asparagus-tips, and tomato soup.

Hungry as they had been, there at length came a time when they were too full to swallow another mouthful.

The richness of some of the food and the disregard of sequence with which they had partaken of the various dishes threatened to play havoc with their digestions later on; but for the time being they were thoroughly happy and glowing with the contentment which comes from being well fed.

"I feel as fit as a fiddle now," declared Dan joyously. "I don't think I have ever had such a good breakfast in all my life. That was a bully idea of yours, girlie."

"I, too, feel like a different person," announced Kate. "Some of those dishes were awfully good, weren't they, Dannie? I'm mighty glad I had that inspiration."

"I feel so strong now that I don't mind the disappointment about that money nearly so much," Dan confided to her. "The whole world seems brighter now. Thanks to that breakfast, I shall start right out in search of a job with hope and courage in my heart, instead of black despair."

"I, too, shall start out job-hunting with renewed courage," chimed in Kate. "I feel as if I am bound to be successful to-day.

"We will start out right now and take different directions, the same as we did yesterday. I'll meet you outside the main entrance to this store at six-thirty. Let us hope that, at least, one of us will have good news to tell the other."

CHAPTER XV.

MORE TROUBLE.

All that afternoon Dan visited stores and offices in search of work; but, alas,

his efforts were without result. Nobody in New York seemed to need his services.

He covered so much ground in his desperate job-hunt that when it came time to retrace his steps in order to keep his appointment with his wife, he was footsore and weary.

All the optimism which had come to him with his hearty breakfast had now deserted him. He was the most wretched and dejected young man in all New York as he trudged painfully along in the direction of the spot where he had arranged to meet Kate.

He turned into Sixth Avenue, and had walked a few blocks up that busy thoroughfare, when his steps were arrested by a big crowd gathered outside a store window.

Unable to pass, he listlessly sought to ascertain what was going on to attract the attention of so many people.

He observed that all eyes were directed toward the window; but, being on the outskirts of the crowd, he could not see what it was which was causing all the excitement.

"She's *all* right, ain't she, Bill?" he heard one young man on the outer edge of the crowd remark to his companion.

"Must be a shameless hussy to do such a thing as that," remarked a thin woman to her stout female companion in an indignant tone. "The police ought to stop it! It's most immodest for a woman to make such a show of herself."

"She must need the money mighty bad. I wouldn't do anything like that for a thousand dollars. I just couldn't bring myself to do it," declared another woman.

"That hair ain't real. You can see it's a wig, if you look close. Wish she would turn around. I'd like to see her face. Bet she's as homely as sin," exclaimed a man loudly.

Dan overheard all these remarks, and several more such, and he wondered exceedingly. He shoved his way through the crowd until he, too, could get a glimpse of what was going on in the store window.

What he actually saw greatly disappointed him. A young woman stood in the store window incessantly combing her hair within plain view of the crowd on the sidewalk.

The young woman's face was turned away from the window, so that Dan could not tell whether or not she was pretty; but there was no denying the fact that her hair was very beautiful and abundant.

It was the color of refined gold, and there was a great deal of it. It reached almost to her knees when she combed it out.

A sign in the window announced to the passers-by:

THIS HAIR IS BEAUTIFUL.

Step Inside, Try a Bottle of Beautylocks, and Watch Your Hair Grow Like It While You Wait.

"Pshaw! A mere hair-restorer advertisement," muttered Dan. "And yet it attracts a crowd as big as this. I didn't think there were so many silly people in New York. I wonder how much that girl gets paid for doing this? Maybe I can get a job of this sort somewhere. There must be plenty of other things to advertise besides hair-restorers.

"I could stand in a store window, for instance, and lather my face in view of the passing throngs. That proposition might appeal to some shaving-soap maker. Or I could advertise a new safety razor, or a patent collar-button, or something of that sort.

"The idea sounds promising! I can't say that I exactly relish the idea of literally making an exhibition of myself. It sort of goes against a fellow's grain. Still, I'm willing to do it—for Kitty's sake. I must get money in some way, and, of course, she need never know just how I earned it."

While he was thus musing he had ceased to watch the girl in the window, but his attention was suddenly recalled to her by a shout from the crowd of onlookers.

This shout was occasioned by the fact that the young woman with the wealth of golden hair had turned around and given her audience a view of her face for the first time. Dan looked, gasped, and turned white.

(To be continued.)

AN INSIDE JOB.

By GEORGE C. JENKS.

When lovers fell out and a mystery stepped in to make one of them think he must be dreaming it all.

"THEN I'm going."

"Very well."

"And I shall never come back."

"I hope you won't."

Bang!

Tom Marston slammed the parlor-door, and found himself in pitch-darkness, fumbling at the hall-rack for his hat. The girl remained on the sofa, where he had left her, her pretty cheeks flushed and her soul full of bitterness.

It had been a foolish quarrel—as many lovers' disputes are—beginning in a discussion of burglars and their ways, and ending in her expressing a doubt of Tom's courage when he declared he never would offer himself as a target for bullets by going down-stairs to investigate a suspicious noise at midnight.

He was going to add, "With a light in my hand." But she broke in to ask if he'd be afraid, and the battle was on before he could explain.

Lucy Grant's father—in the real-estate business—always insisted that he did not fear burglars, but every door and window of his home in Brooklyn was secured at night with electric burglar-alarms that would sound in his bedroom and elsewhere if any one tried to get in.

He had just had the apparatus installed, and Lucy had been telling Tom about it. This had led to talk about burglaries in general, resulting in the quarrel which had sent Tom out of the parlor in a rage—forever!

It was not the first time he and Lucy had parted eternally, and, as usual, Tom was hardly out of sight of his sweetheart before he regretted it.

"Darn it! I wish I hadn't been so hasty," he muttered, as he found his hat and tackled the front door. "But it was all her fault."

He flung the door open and peered forth into the night.

Lord! How dreary everything looked, notwithstanding that the air was balmy with the breath of late June, and the sky a riot of diamonds on black velvet. Tom hesitated.

What would the world be without Lucy? Nothing but a long, sad journey, without one ray of brightness, until it ended inevitably in his death—of a broken heart!

"Gee! I can't do it. I'll just *have* to make up."

He shut the door with a mighty slam that echoed through the house, but—Tom was still inside.

As he stepped back in the blackness of the hall, the door of the parlor—in which Lucy had turned off the light—opened, and the girl's quick, indignant breathing sounded almost in his ear, although it was too dark to see her. Then he heard her at the front door.

"It's all right," he thought. "She believes I've gone, and she's going to call me back."

But he was mistaken. She did not open the door. Instead, sundry metallic clicks told him she was adjusting the new burglar-alarm. When she had finished her task, it would be impossible for him to get out without raising a ruction in her father's bedroom.

Lucy was so angry that she spoke her thoughts aloud as she set the burglar-trap. She had no mother, and was, therefore, accustomed to be self-reliant.

"I never want to see him again," she murmured softly, but with a determination that made Tom shudder as he plastered himself against the wall by the side of the hall-rack. "I've told him so before, but I mean it this time. I hate him!"

"Wow!" groaned Tom inaudibly.

She swept past him in the darkness, and he heard her light step as she ran swiftly up the stairs—for every one else

in the house was in bed, and she could not help feeling that some unseen hand might clutch at her heels or skirts out of the awful shadows.

"Well, I'm in a nice fix," decided Tom as he felt his way to the front door. "I don't believe I can get out."

He caught hold of what he believed to be a bolt, but a low buzzing warned him to let it alone.

"The deuce take that burglar-alarm! I don't know how it works, and I'm liable to set some big bell ringing if I interfere with it. But I must manage the thing somehow. I can't stay here all night. If I only had a light!"

But Tom was not a smoker, and he hadn't a match about him. As to finding one in the house in the dark, that seemed hopeless.

"I must have a light. It's my only chance," he told himself. "But I must wait till Lucy has had time to get to sleep before I do any exploring. What would she think if she knew I was here? And what would her father say and do? He has a lot of money in the house, too, for Lucy told me, and I suppose he'd shoot me for a burglar before I could say a word."

He seated himself disconsolately on a chair in the hall—after falling over it and banging his forehead against the wall—and settled down to wait.

It was a lonely vigil, and Tom got up once, resolved to fling open the front door and make a bolt for it, letting the burglar-alarm do its worst. But just then he heard the clatter of hoofs on the road, and he knew that a mounted policeman was passing. He shook his head despondently.

"It wouldn't do. I would rather spend the night here than in a cell in the police station. Besides, if I can only find some matches, I'll get out without making any noise, and no one will be the wiser."

He fidgeted about on the chair for more than an hour, and then, as a clock somewhere in the rambling, old-fashioned house struck twelve, he groped along the hall, at the very end of which he knew he should find the kitchen.

The hall seemed to Tom to be more than a mile long, and, as there was not the faintest glimmer of light, he butted into the wall on either side again and again. Suddenly he found himself at the foot of the staircase.

As he stumbled against the bottom step and sprawled over half a dozen others, he could hardly believe he had come only such a short distance.

He stood perfectly still for a few moments, to make sure that he had not been heard by any of the sleepers above, and thankful that the stairs were so thickly carpeted. Then he plodded on again, feeling his way on both sides. Bump went his head against a door.

"The kitchen, by Jove!" was his mental ejaculation as he turned the handle and entered. "It's as dark as all the rest of the house. It's the wooden shutters. Lucy needn't have talked about my being frightened of burglars, considering the precautions taken by her own father, with his precious boarded windows and electric bells."

His reflections were cut short by his coming into collision with the kitchen range and knocking the stove-lifter into a sheet-iron coal-scuttle. The racket sounded to Tom like a safe dropping from a six-story window into a wagon-load of tin wash-boilers.

"That settles it. Now I *am* done for."

Tom stood motionless, for he was convinced the infernal noise would bring some one down-stairs—most likely Mr. Grant, with a revolver in his hand.

"And he's a dead shot, too. I've seen him perform at a shooting-gallery."

For perhaps ten minutes there was no sound from above, and Tom was congratulating himself on the disturbance not having awakened anybody, when he heard an unmistakable creaking, as if some one were coming cautiously down the stairs.

"Good Heavens! He did hear it, after all. Now for it! I wonder if I can get the gun out of his hand before he shoots if I jump at him unawares. I'll have to do something. I don't mean to stand still and be butchered just because I am shut in this house when I would much rather be at home. And yet—he is Lucy's father. I can't hurt him. I should never forgive myself if I were to kill him. What's more—Lucy would never forgive me, either. Well, if ever

I get out of this scrape, I'll never tell her I'm going to leave her again, no matter how mad she makes me."

Meanwhile, the stairs continued to creak — very softly, but loudly enough for Tom, with his nerves like cello-strings at concert-pitch, to note every separate squeak. At the same moment a low growling under his feet made him jump.

"That's the dog in the cellar. Jupiter! I hope they haven't left the cellar-door open. He's a bulldog, and they never let go. One good thing about them is that they seldom bark. If that were a terrier, he'd raise the roof. I'm glad it *is* a bulldog. Still, if the cellar-door *should* happen to be open—"

The person on the stairs had nearly reached the bottom, and was moving along the hall toward the kitchen. It was a woman. Tom knew that by the light footfall and the swishing of skirts against the walls. He could not see anything; but just as the newcomer entered the kitchen, she coughed slightly.

"It's Lucy!" said Tom to himself. "What a brave girl she is—coming down here alone. She heard that clatter I made, and, of course, she expects to find a burglar."

Just then she spoke:

"Tom!"

He almost collapsed when he heard his name whispered, but he managed to reply "Yes!" in a husky tone that did not sound at all like his own.

Swiftly she glided over to him, guided by the direction of his voice, and then he felt a large pocketbook thrust into his hand. He closed his fingers about it mechanically.

"This is the money," she murmured in a husky voice. "He had it under his bed, but I got it while he was out of his room to-night. There's two thousand dollars in the wallet. That's what I told you there would be. Let everything else go. This will be enough."

It was more than enough for Tom Marston. He was too much astonished to answer.

Lucy had told him that evening that her father had collected two thousand dollars on a mortgage, and she was worried because he meant to keep the cash in the house until the next day. This bit of confidence had been part of the conversation about burglars which had ended in the fateful quarrel.

But what did this mean now? Could it be possible that Lucy would rob her own father, and that she intended to make him a partner in the crime? Yet, how could that be when she could not suppose he was anywhere near her?

Certainly she did not know he was in the house. It was only by the merest chance and chapter of accidents that he *was* there.

But—didn't she know it? She had just called him by his name. Had she been aware all along that he had not gone out when he slammed the front door? Was she so deep that she—

But at this point Tom Marston gave it up. It was too much for his brain. A little more, and he would be out of his mind—a driveling idiot.

"You know what to do?" she continued, still in that low, tense whisper. "Slip the little catch aside at the kitchen window and move the wire away. That will shut off the burglar-alarm. Then you can push open the shutters, get through and slip across the lawn under the trees to the side street, and get away. S-s-sh! Don't speak."

She was gone, and in a few moments he heard the stairs creaking again.

Still clutching the wallet mechanically, he tried to get some sort of mental hold on the situation.

"We were talking about elopements this evening, and I said how romantic it would be to run away right now and be married. We've been engaged long enough. She didn't say much about it, but I could see she agreed with me. And yet, if she meant to elope with me to-night, what has she gone up-stairs for? Oh, I'm crazy. That's the whole explanation. No. That isn't it. I'm asleep, and I'll wake up in my bed directly. Yes, of course."

But Tom wasn't satisfied with this interpretation. He had never felt so wide-awake in his life, and he fell to wondering again.

"This money that she has given me—what did she take it for? Of course, her father has a great deal more than two thousand dollars belonging to her, left her by her mother, and she might

feel herself entitled to draw this much in advance, especially when she had made up her mind to elope. But why didn't she tell me this evening? Oh, well, she would, if we hadn't had that scrap. There's one thing sure—she knew I didn't go out when I banged the front door, and—"

A narrow shaft of white light flashed in his eyes, a powerful arm was flung around his neck, an unshaven chin scratched his face, and the wallet was snatched from his hand.

It was all so sudden that Tom was bewildered. The thin stream of light had vanished. He had heard no footsteps, and the attack came when he supposed himself absolutely alone.

But Tom Marston was an active young fellow, and he grappled vigorously with his mysterious assailant even as the wallet was torn from his grasp.

"You rascal! I'll break your neck!" hissed Tom.

There was a crash of crockery and tinware, and then, as a window was thrown up and a wooden shutter forced wide open, he saw his man go through the casement a flying. At the same instant arose a demoniacal din both inside and outside the house, which testified to the efficiency of Mr. Grant's burglar-alarm.

Clang! Clang! Clang! in the hall.

B-z-z-z-z-z-z-z! B-z-z-z-z-z-z-z! B-z-z-z-z-z-z-z! on the stairs.

Ting-a-ling-ling-ling-ling! in the bedroom of the owner of the house.

Nor was this all. Outside the window some fiendish connection with the electric wires let off a dozen loud torpedoes, one after the other, in a series of deafening explosions.

Still more, every gas-burner in the house burst into flame — automatically lighted by the same electrical agency which, through bells and torpedoes, had proclaimed to all that part of Brooklyn that burglars were abroad.

The whole interior was brilliantly illuminated. At the same instant two lamps at the front door also lighted up the lawn all the way to the front gate.

"I'm going to catch that fellow!" muttered Tom as he jumped on the table from which the crockery and tinware had been hurled and leaped through the window.

Down the lawn to the gate dashed the stranger. There was no time to bother with the rather complicated fastening, so he climbed over. Tom followed, and as he vaulted, instead of climbed, he was soon close on the heels of the man whom he had made up his mind was a burglar.

The latter was a fast runner, and the rubber-soled shoes he wore were just the thing for sprinting. But the young man behind could do his hundred yards in eleven seconds, and was on top of him in less than a block.

There was a short struggle, and then Tom, with a skilful "back-heel," put the burglar down.

"Where's that pocketbook?" he demanded.

"What pocketbook? I haven't any pocketbook," snarled the prostrate robber, defiant to the last. "What are you talking about, anyhow?"

Tom Marston knew something about the ways of thieves, and he ran back over the way they had come, convinced that the sly rascal had thrown the money away when he realized that he could not outstrip his pursuer, determined not to be taken with the stolen property in his possession—"caught with the goods," in the vernacular of the underworld.

A mounted policeman was galloping toward them, and, of course, the officer patrolling the post on foot could not be far away.

Near the gate Tom found the pocketbook, the money still in it—just as the horseman swung up and seized him by the arm without dismounting. A "bike cop" skimmed up on his wheel and caught him on the other side, at the same moment snatching the pocketbook from him.

"What's this? Where did you get it?" he demanded gruffly.

"Wait a minute and I'll explain," answered Tom breathlessly.

"Sure you'll explain—to the lieutenant at the station," was the sneering rejoinder. "I'll bet you're one of the gang that's been working Brooklyn for the last month."

"That's what," acquiesced the horseman, who had slipped from his saddle, and was gripping Tom's arm tighter than ever. "And here comes his pal. Dan Kelly's got him."

Dan Kelly was a foot policeman, and he had the discomfited burglar by the collar of his coat with one hand.

The two officers holding Tom looked curiously at Dan Kelly's captive, and the bicycle man exclaimed: "Why, Dan, that's Curly Tom Boone you have there."

The prisoner scowled, and Dan, looking into his face, cried delightedly: "By the powers! 'You're right, Larry. I've landed him, sure. It is Tom Boone, and we want him badly."

"Why, of course it is," put in the mounted officer. "We have his mug and measurements at headquarters. This will put you in right with the inspector, Dan. Do you know 'this fellow we have?" indicating Tom Marston.

"Looks like Kid Pearson," remarked the bicycle man, scrutinizing Tom's face with unpleasant closeness.

"No," said Dan, shaking his head. "The Kid's up the river."

"Mayn't he be College Jim?" suggested the horse policeman.

"Or Pete Simmons?" threw in the "bike cop."

But the three officers remembered that College Jim and Pete Simmons were also in Sing Sing; so, obviously, Tom Marston could not be either of those distinguished scoundrels.

"If we didn't know they were all behind the bars, I should say that fellow was one of 'em, sure," declared Dan Kelly.

Tom Marston had to digest the conviction that he resembled three notorious crooks as well as he could, as he saw that Mr. Grant, his sweetheart's father, was standing at his front door, in his pajamas and a plug hat, with Lucy, fully dressed and looking more lovely than ever, by his side.

"Let's take 'em up to the house," advised the bicycle man, and Tom was dragged forward, with Curly Tom Boone, to be inspected.

Tom caught Lucy's eye for an instant, and he thought he saw sympathy there, mingled with horrified astonishment.

John Grant was a power in politics, and the policemen addressed him with more respect than they might have vouchsafed to a citizen who did not carry a thousand votes in his vest-pocket.

"Here they are, Mr. Grant," said the mounted officer. "We caught this fellow"—nodding toward Tom—"with a pocketbook that has your name inside the flap. We have identified his pal as an ex-convict, wanted for the robbery of a post-office in Jersey. Do you know this one?"

He shoved the unlucky Tom Marston forward as he spoke, so that Mr. Grant should get a good look at his face in the light of the lamps.

"Oh, papa! It's Tom!" broke in Lucy as she ran down the steps.

"And I caught the thief who was running away with the pocketbook," explained Tom hurriedly.

"Yes, papa! Don't you hear? I knew that was it. Tom was passing the house—"

"Pretty late to be out," growled Dan Kelly suspiciously.

"I'd been to a political meeting, and was walking home for exercise," said Tom.

"Yes, and he was passing our gate," continued Lucy, "when we saw the burglar coming from the side of our house. It was natural for a brave man like Tom to stop him and make him give up what he had stolen."

Tom shot a grateful look at her. She had called him a brave man, and all that quarrel had been for nothing.

"Did you take that pocketbook from him?" asked Mr. Grant, breaking silence for the first time.

He had been looking at Tom in considerable perplexity.

"He threw it away, and I picked it up. Then the officers came up, and, seeing the money in my hand, they thought I was the thief."

"What an awful thing!" exclaimed Lucy. "Papa, do you hear that? They actually believed Tom had been in our house at this time of night."

Tom Marston winced, but made no comment.

The policemen began to think they might have made a mistake, so far as he was concerned.

"Do you know this young man, Mr. Grant?" asked the mounted officer.

"Of course I do," answered Mr. Grant as his daughter pinched his arm. "He's a friend of the family. In fact,

he's engaged to marry my daughter. Don't you suppose I'm the kind of man to know all about my proposed son-in-law? I'll answer for him. You'd better let him go."

The last sentence was uttered with a significance that the policemen well understood, and they took their hands off Tom, although with manifest reluctance. It was Mr. Grant's political influence that was working — more than their own belief that the young man was altogether blameless.

It is not easy to dispel the suspicions of a policeman at any time, and especially when he thinks he has made an important arrest.

"Well, Curly Tom Boone was in your house, Mr. Grant. How do you suppose he got there, when all the doors and windows were protected by burglar-alarms?"

"Well, the alarms went off, didn't they?" rejoined Mr. Grant. "What puzzles me is how he got the pocketbook from under my bed on the second floor."

The "bike cop" shook his head sagely.

"Looks like an inside job to me, and—"

He broke off suddenly and dashed around the house to the outside of the kitchen. Back he came, a minute later, holding by the arm a girl of about Lucy's height and figure, in the white apron and cap of a servant.

She was angry and defiant as she tried to shake the officer off, but he held tightly as, turning to Mr. Grant, he asked:

"How long has this girl been with you, Mr. Grant?"

"Two days. I got her at an employment agency. Her name is Mary Brown."

"Good references?"

"She had strong written recommendations from two former employers in Chicago."

"Did you communicate with those employers?"

"Well, you see, our two girls had just left us, and we wanted some one in a hurry. But I have written to the Chicago addresses."

"I'll bet you've had no answers."

"No. But—"

"You never will, either. This girl's name is not Mary Brown, but Wilson. She's known as Winnipeg Mary. She's a friend of Curly, or Tom, Boone, the man we have here. Show Mr. Grant that picture you found in his pocket, Dan."

Dan Kelly held out a photograph which he took from an envelope. It was unmistakably that of the girl who called herself Mary Brown.

"Here's a letter I found in his pocket," said Kelly. "It's addressed to him, and signed 'Mary Wilson.' It calls him 'Dear Tom,' and tells him to be at the kitchen-door at nine o'clock and it will be all right."

Lucy took the letter and examined it closely under one of the lamps.

"That's Mary's writing," she cried positively. "I know it well. She wrote a list of groceries she wanted yesterday, and I noticed that she made her 's' with a funny little twist at the bottom, and that she put a cross over her 't,' instead of a dot."

"It *is* an inside job," said the bicycle man confidently; "and I can tell you just how it was done."

"I'll bet you can't," blurted out Mary. "My Tom's too slick for—"

"Shut up!" growled Curly Tom. "They ain't got us yet. This ain't no third degree."

"All right, Tom," was her submissive response.

Marston was beginning to understand how it was that he had been addressed as "Tom" by a feminine voice in the dark kitchen. Another thing—he remarked that the voices of this Mary and Lucy were somewhat alike.

The "bike cop" went on composedly: "The whole thing is clear. Winnipeg Mary admitted Curly to her kitchen about nine o'clock, when it was dark, and most likely left some way for him to get out without setting off the burglar-alarm. Did you find any swag done up, ready to carry away, Mr. Grant?"

"Yes. All the silverware in the dining-room is in a sack on the floor."

"Sure! That's what I expected to hear. But when Curly Tom got hold of the wallet, with two thousand dollars in it, he wouldn't risk lugging a big bundle through the street with the chance of

being stopped by the first officer he happened to meet."

"But I don't see how he got the pocketbook. It was between the bed and mattress in my room, up-stairs."

"Well, he did get it, you see. Was it there when you went to bed?"

"It was there half an hour before. I looked at it just before I went down-stairs to set the burglar-alarms."

"But you didn't look to see that it was still safe when you went up-stairs again?"

"No. But— Ah! I remember now. I saw Mary just going up-stairs to her room on the third story, and—"

"That'll be about all, Mr. Grant," grinned the "bike cop." "She had your pocketbook then, but she did not get a chance to pass it to Curly Tom until every one had gone to bed. I'll take her to the station with Curly. You will have this other young man in court in the morning, will you, Mr. Grant? He's an important witness, you know."

"Certainly. We'll both be there."

"Thanks! Good night!"

As the policemen marched away with their prisoners, Lucy whispered to Tom triumphantly: "You did come back, didn't you, although you said when you banged the door that you never would."

Tom said nothing. He only squeezed her hand.

TWELVE GOOD MEN.*

By R. K. THOMPSON.

The fearsome alternative that faced an honest man when he was picked as one of a dozen to try a fellow mortal for his life.

CHAPTER XVII.

A SHADOW LIFTED.

HOPELESS that the other could offer its explanation, David voiced this last remaining piece of evidence against his brother-in-law.

"While I stood outside this door," he said slowly, "thinking that it was your voice I heard within, my belief that you were really mixed up in the row was strengthened by hearing the other—the strange voice—call you by name. Plainly as I now hear myself talking to you, I heard that voice exclaim: 'I will denounce you, Frank Mack!'"

If David had feared that his brother-in-law would take this positive and overwhelming evidence to be the last straw that would break down the reserve that held him from confession, that dread doubt was not realized.

Mack received this information in calm but scowling silence. His head was bent, and he appeared to be thinking deeply.

Suddenly he started erect.

"It's just barely possible," he muttered, moving across to the telephone on the wall. "I wonder—" He stood studying the instrument for a moment. Then, determinedly, his hand reached forth, and he released the receiver.

"Morningside, 11093!" he called.

Puzzled, David waited while Mack stood stiffly at attention before the phone.

What was this new action of his brother-in-law's, he wondered? Did he expect an answer to the problem over the wire?

Now, his relative was talking—asking for some one—some man—and now he was talking to him.

David could make nothing of the one-sided conversation. He heard his brother-in-law exhorting the man at the other end of the wire for information as to his whereabouts on the evening of April 6. He also heard what was evidently a hard-fought cross-examination on Mack's part to draw from the other the facts of his actions on that night.

There was more which was unintelligible. Then his relative rang off and turned swiftly to face him, his face triumphantly flushed.

"Here's the solution to your riddle of the use of my name, Dave," he cried

* *Began July* ARGOSY. *Single copies, 10 cents.*

jubilantly. "I've just had Isador Saxstein on the wire—he's a lawyer with an office across the hall from here.

"I happened to think that he and I were slightly acquainted, and I remembered that he had a voice loud enough to wake the dead. I thought I'd call him up at his house and see if he could possibly have been one of the parties to the quarrel you overheard. This is what I found out:

"On the night you called here he was closeted with a client in his office. He—"

"But wait!" David broke in.

"Several witnesses have testified that no one but you, one other man and the corpse of the murderer's victim, were in the building that night."

"Let me finish," Mack went on. "Saxstein told me that his client was a notorious character, and he smuggled him into his office and out again without anybody knowing it. He kept the lights turned out in his room all through their session, so no one would know they were there.

"Now, this client of his was rehearsing with the lawyer the story he was to tell the jury when a case he was mixed in was brought up.

"The quarrel you heard was the dress rehearsal between Saxstein and this man. The lawyer has a bass voice that might easily be taken for mine by any one hearing it while standing in front of a door behind which they knew me to be.

"Now comes the part where my name was used. The client's case was against a man named Frank McArthur. He was practising with the lawyer his recital of a quarrel he had had with this man.

"Saxstein says that at the point where the man cried out, 'I will denounce you, Frank Mac—' he checked him because he wanted more feeling put into the line, to work on the jurors' sympathies.

"And, instead of hearing my name, you heard a part of some one else's—and that part was my name in full."

David felt his heart leap up into his throat, choking back the words he tried to utter at this final clearing away of every trace of suspicion against his wife's brother.

Frank Mack was not guilty; he was innocent as—

Suddenly Brandon stopped at the thought.

If his brother-in-law was not guilty of this murder—was the man on trial innocent, as he had supposed?

Might his ballot, after all, have been cast in the cause of justice?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PITY OF IT.

PERHAPS half an hour after David had been reassured by Frank that no ill-feeling was harbored in the latter's heart against him for the suspicions he had held, Brandon broached a subject which had been puzzling him for some few minutes past.

"Frank," he said slowly, "there's only one more thing in this whole affair that I don't understand yet. I've told you about the evidence produced in the trial about the number of people in the building on the night old man Hoyt was killed. Now, I can't understand how it is that no one knew you left the place when you did."

Frank laughed.

"That's the simplest thing in the world to explain," he said quickly. "The elevators weren't running at ten o'clock when I came out of my office. So I walked down-stairs and found the night-watchman in the hall—asleep.

"I thought if I could avoid waking the poor fellow up I would; so I walked past him to the entrance without rousing him, on the chance that the doors might be unlocked.

"And, sure enough — they were. So all I did was to step outside, close them after me, and I was gone—nobody the wiser."

David laughed.

"Queer, isn't it?" he remarked, "how the most difficult-seeming problems have, in reality, the simplest solutions?"

"By George!" Mack exclaimed. "That reminds me!"

Going into his private office, he rummaged a moment on his desk, to return a moment later, a letter in his hand.

"Speaking of the night-watchman here in the building," he said, "brought to my mind this letter from another employee of the place."

He opened the single, folded sheet and glanced hurriedly over it before looking up.

"This came some time to-day," he said, "and I got it when I dropped in to-night. It's from one of the window-cleaners here in the building — a mere boy of about twenty or so; rather a protégé of mine, by the way.

"I've been sending him to night-school, because he impressed me as being such a bright chap that I thought it a pity he should have no chance with other lads of his age.

"He writes to tell me that he fell from one of our second-floor windows and fractured his hip, and he's laid up now in St. Ruth's Hospital. Wants me to come around and see him, poor duffer!"

David shook his head.

"How did it happen—and when?"

"Why," Frank answered, "he says he was working late, at about seven o'clock —the days are longer now, you know— and he lost his footing some way and fell.

"It happened," he referred to the letter in his hand, "on—why"—he broke off—"here's a coincidence! It happened on April sixth—the day of the murder in this building."

"Let me see it!" cried David excitedly, reaching for the boy's letter. "Why —Frank — if this chap was working around the building at seven o'clock, he may know something of this very case!"

"By George!" Mack pondered. "Do you know, there may be a chance of it? The thought hadn't struck me, but—"

"We can't afford to let any chance slip to find out whatever we can of the affair," Brandon caught him up. "We owe it to our common decency to help that convicted man, if it's in our power —for I don't believe he's guilty, any more than you are. My experience with circumstantial evidence has made me skeptical of its value."

"I'm with you in anything you do, old man," Mack offered quickly. "Shall we go at once to St. Ruth's and talk with the boy?"

David hesitated. Already he had spent an hour from the time of his release in court, which he should have given to his wife. Yet something in this boy's story might help to free the man he had helped to wrong — and it was right that he should now do all in his power to secure justice for the prisoner.

And so they set off. Fifteen minutes brought them to the hospital, located midway of the city. David waited below, while Mack went up-stairs to the lad's cot.

In less than a half hour his brother-in-law was back, the light of some important discovery in his eyes.

"David," he exultantly cried when they were outside, "we've got at the secret of the thing this time for keeps.

"That boy up there knows how Hoyt died!"

Brandon stopped, his hand gripping the other's arm.

"He does?" he repeated eagerly. "How does he know?"

"Because he saw him killed!" Mack answered triumphantly. "Listen!

"He says that he was washing the windows of the office next door to the old gentleman's at five o'clock in the afternoon — standing outside on the coping that circles the front of the building at the eighth floor.

"He stepped around and looked in through Hoyt's window at the very minute the old gentleman *tripped over the loose corner of his rug and fell, his head smashing against the sharp edge of his desk.*

"The boy gave me the hint of his story by asking me if I'd heard anything of the 'old guy w'at had a fit the afternoon he got hurted and fell on his nut in Room 821.' I know that was Hoyt's office number, and I sounded the lad out until I got the whole story from him.

"He knew nothing of the old gentleman's death. He has been in the hospital since the evening of the calamity."

"Then there's been no murder done at all?" David queried dazedly.

"Not according to our young man's story," his brother-in-law replied.

"And his story's worth ten or twenty tales of circumstantial evidence," answered David. "He's an eye-witness. With his testimony produced in court, that man doomed to die will be saved!"

"Hooray!" laughed Mack exuberantly. "Let's hurry over to the house and tell Mary."

David started. Mary must not see her brother just now. She did not yet know that he was innocent of the crime of which they had both thought him guilty. She must be prepared to see Frank under different circumstances—the news must first be broken to her.

"I'll tell you, Frank," said David slowly. "The most important thing to do right now is to put this new evidence into the hands of the man who is falsely accused—into the hands of his lawyers.

"They're probably at the court-house with him now. And if you'd run down and tell your story, have them send a notary to your window-cleaner and take his testimony, the poor duffer would be hurried along immensely toward his release. Will you do that for me?"

"Glad of the chance," Mack answered, turning quickly. "It won't take me an hour. And I'll be up to see Mary the minute I'm through—you tell her I'm coming."

"I'll tell her," David promised.

His brother-in-law hastened off, and Brandon headed for home.

His heart was lighter than it had been for weeks as he ran up the steep flight of stairs to their tiny apartment.

"Mary!" he cried, bursting in at the door. "Mary!"

There was an answering rustle behind the curtain of the parlor-door, and his wife stood on the threshold.

"I've got wonderful news, dear!" he shouted to her exultantly. "Beginning with the true story that our fortunes are made!"

He came toward her with arms outstretched. "One of the jurors, a man named Thorpe, a writer, is going to have me do the illustrations for a five-thousand-dollar series of articles he has ordered! That's just *one* piece of good news. Next—"

He stopped. Mary had turned away from him and moved back into the parlor. Stupidly, he stood looking after her. Then he stepped into the room.

"Mary!" he called sharply.

From a far corner of the room she turned to face him as he stood in the center of the floor.

"I know," she said dully. Her face was drawn and haggard. "I've read the papers. And I know," she repeated vacantly, "what you've done!"

"What I've done?" He stared at her. "What—"

What did she mean? he thought wildly. He had voted to send a man he thought was innocent to his death. But he had done it at her plea. And now she was berating him for—

"After what I said to you, David." Mary was sobbing now. "When I told you that I wanted you honest—honest—before and beyond anything else." Her voice broke. "When I came to you and begged you not to do what you have now done—"

"What do you mean?"

David's voice was hard. He would not tell her of her brother's innocence, of the condemned man's guiltlessness now. That could wait—she would learn of that presently. First, he must know what she meant by this accusation.

"What do you mean?" he repeated more sharply.

"I mean," and she faced him sadly, "that you have destroyed my faith in you. I cared so much for your honor that I came to you and begged you to sacrifice my brother to save—"

David started forward.

"You pleaded with me to save your brother?" he asked, amazed.

Mary stared at him in turn.

"Then you thought"—her eyes widened and she faltered—"you thought that I was asking you to save my brother—oh!" She flung out her arms to him. "Do you think I meant so little what I said when I told you how highly I prized your honesty?"

In silence their eyes were leveled each at the other's.

And in that silence a realization of their misunderstanding—and of what it meant to them both—entered their hearts.

To David Brandon, also, came with the pain of a knife-thrust the added knowledge of what his experience of the week past had done for him.

He had entered the toils of the jury system an honest man. And he had come out of it—unclean.

In silence Mary stretched out her arms to him and stumbled forward.

THE END.

GAS AND A TELEPHONE.

By J. F. VALENTINE.

What came of a big company's refusal to break a stringent office rule.

"HALLO, Les!"

Mabie turned quickly from his paper-littered desk to greet his rotund-faced brother-in-law, whose entrance had been unobserved, so engrossed was he in the work before him.

And there was just an indication of a frown on his brow as he almost reluctantly arose and extended his hand.

"Hallo, Billy!" he said; then added hastily: "Pull up a chair."

"When did you get back?" Hamilton queried, as he seated himself.

"Oh, me? I've been back for a week," Mabie replied. "Lillian just returned to-day."

"You don't say so!" Hamilton exclaimed. "I didn't expect you for another week or so, but I met Tom Burlew to-day, and he told me he'd seen you in town. So, thought I'd drop in a minute."

He lolled back in his chair lazily, and his eyes settled upon the paper-strewn desk.

"Gee, but that looks like work!" he added, with a laugh.

"It not only looks it," the other retorted quickly; "it *is* work. I've been toiling early and late ever since I returned to the city, but, hang me, if I can catch up!"

"Serves you right, for taking two months' vacation," the other laughed. "It's more than a working man deserves. Now, if I did—"

"It *would* be different," Mabie interrupted. "I have to work for a living. You are one of those fortunate mortals—one of those lucky cusses, who say good-by to all labor after their father's will is read."

"Why, you talk just as if you weren't glad to see me. I hope I'm not intruding."

Mabie's tone suddenly lost its impatience.

"I meant nothing, Billy," he said hastily. "But wait just a few minutes and I'll talk to you. I've got something here that must be got out immediately."

He turned to his desk and fumbled among some papers.

"Go ahead. Don't mind me," Hamilton rejoined magnanimously. "How late are you going to stay here?"

"Till about seven," was the short response.

"Forget it," Hamilton snapped. "Come on to dinner with me. Get Lillian on the phone—"

He stopped abruptly, and gave vent to a loud, hearty laugh, then added: "I forgot your antipathy to those modern necessities."

Mabie turned slowly in his chair and faced his relative. "That's where you're wrong," he said, a slight smile of satisfaction playing about his lips. "We've got a phone."

"*You* have?" the other exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, *I* have. I had it put in day before yesterday. Remind me to give you the number before you go, because you can't get us without it."

"Why not?"

"Because it's what is known as a non-listed phone. You see, it's this way. My objection to having a phone has always been that I'd be called up at any hour, and by every Tom, Dick, and Harry. Now, I didn't want that, and rather than have it, we went without, much as we needed it. Then some one told me of this kind—non-listed they call them—and it was just what I wanted."

"But what's the game?" Hamilton questioned blankly.

"Just this. Our name doesn't go in the directory. No one knows you have a telephone except your personal friends, and even they can't get you unless they know the number."

"But wouldn't Central give it to them, if they asked for it?"

"No. That's the beauty of the thing."

"Queer stunt," Hamilton mumbled thoughtfully.

"Not at all. Mighty good stunt, I think. If I hadn't, I would never have had the thing put in."

Hamilton suddenly roused himself from the thoughtful mood into which he had fallen.

"I say, Les, let's all have dinner together to-night. You and Lillian have it with me."

Mabie gave one fleeting glance at his desk as the thought of his brother-in-law's peculiarity flashed into his mind.

"But you dine at six," he said.

"Never known to dine at any other hour, either later or earlier," was the positive assertion. "Always six o'clock."

"But I've got work—"

"Hang the work!" Hamilton interrupted. "It'll keep. It's the one thing that always does."

"But, Lillian—"

The other cut his protest short.

"Get her on the phone. What good is one if you don't use it?"

"By Jove, I'll take you at your word!" Mabie exclaimed. "I'm tired—"

"You look it," the other put in.

"I am, too," Mabie assented. "If I can get Lillian on the phone, we'll join you." Then he added quickly: "She may be out. I was to have met her at the Waldorf at seven. The servants are not here yet—Lillian left them in the country to fix things up for the winter—so we're taking our meals out till they arrive."

"Then I came at the proper time," Hamilton laughed.

"Yes, if Lillian hasn't gone out for the afternoon, and arranged to go direct to the hotel to meet me."

"At seven?" Hamilton queried.

"Yes."

"Too late for me," he declared positively. "Six, or not at all, is my rule for dining. But call up and see if Lillian's at home."

Mabie nodded his approval of this course of action, and, drawing out his wallet, fumbled among the papers it contained.

"What are you after now?" Hamilton questioned.

"The telephone number," the other replied, as he sorted over the contents of his pocketbook. "I haven't memorized it yet."

But the slip he wanted did not come to light.

"Can't you find it?" the other asked impatiently.

"Not yet," Mabie returned, still keeping up the search.

"Well, don't waste any more time looking. Call up Central and get the number." Hamilton took out his watch. "It's five-fifteen now."

Mabie drew his telephone toward him, and placed the receiver at his ear.

"Central," he said, in response to that person's, "Number, please," "I want to be connected with Mr. Mabie's phone. It isn't listed in the book."

"What's the address?" was the girl's query.

"Eighty-Ninth Street—seven sixty-five West."

"One moment, please. I'll give you the information-desk."

Mabie turned toward Hamilton, but before he could speak a voice at the other end of the wire announced, "Information," and followed it quickly with the question, "What number do you want?"

"That's what I want you to tell me," Mabie replied.

There followed a brief conversation as to the name and address of the person he wished to reach, and again there was silence as the operator concluded with: "Just a moment, please."

But the moment was little more than a few seconds, when her voice was again on the wire.

"That is a non-listed phone," she told him. "I can't give you the number."

"You *what?*" Mabie gasped.

"I say I can't give you the number," was the firm refusal.

"Why—why—" Mabie stammered, in astonishment. "That's my own phone, and I want to be connected with it."

"I'll give you the manager," the voice on the other end announced.

"Yes, let me speak to him," Mabie directed, and he then turned to Hamilton.

"Why, of all impudence," he grumbled. "She refused to give me my own phone. I'll—"

But he did not finish the sentence. A male voice at the other end of the wire announced, "This is the manager," and Mabie turned quickly to the mouthpiece again.

"I want to be connected with my house," he spluttered. "I'm Mr. Mabie."

There is a saying, that "a soft voice turneth away wrath," but it was not applicable to this case. Instead, as the manager told him that it was one of the company's strictest rules never to give out the number of a non-listed phone, Mabie's anger increased.

And although the manager tried to reason with him, assuring him that while he did not doubt that he *was* Mr. Mabie, he could readily see that if he gave him the number, others might try the same tactics.

"I'm sorry, sir," he added, "but I can't help you in any way."

"I'll have the blamed thing taken out to-morrow," Mabie stormed.

"Very well, sir," was the calm reply, and before Mabie could speak further the click he heard told him the manager had disconnected the wires.

Mabie slammed his receiver angrily upon the hook, and turned to face Hamilton, who was smiling broadly at the unusual predicament that had aroused the other's ire.

"A pretty state of affairs," Mabie snorted. "Paying for a telephone, and yet you've got nothing to say about it."

"Well, it's your own fault," Hamilton began.

"In what way?" the other demanded angrily.

"Oh, forget it," Hamilton drawled.

"But it makes me hot—"

"What's the use?" the stouter of the two protested. "It does no good to get angry over it. You can't get it, and that ends it.'"

He drew out his watch.

"Guess it ends our dining together, too," he added. "It's five-thirty.'"

"I don't know that it does,'" Mabie contended, as he again faced his desk and, with one sweep of his hands, gathered in a rough pile the papers that covered it. Then he dropped them vindictively into an open drawer.

"I'm through for to-day," he announced. "I'm tired, and—and that confounded telephone affair makes me hot under the collar."

"If you were as fat as I am you'd be good-natured," Hamilton laughed. "A little thing like that wouldn't upset *me*."

"Then I have a good reason for getting angry over it," the other claimed. "I'm *not* fat like you."

Mabie was already upon his feet and, reaching for his hat and cane, announced, "I'm going."

"Where?" Hamilton asked.

"To accept your invitation, I hope," was the quick response. "I'm going home in the hope of finding Lillian there. If she is, we'll all go together."

"*We'll?*" Hamilton put in.

"Of course. Why not?"

"If I'm included in that 'we'll', you're doing it without my consent."

"How so?"

"Because I'm not going with you."

"You're not?" Mabie exclaimed.

"No; I don't really feel I need the exercise. Anyway, I've got a better plan. I'll go up to the Waldorf, and you go home. If Lillian is there, you two hurry, and we'll dine together. If she isn't, you come to the hotel and watch me eat, and when Lillian arrives I'll watch you two do the same. Is it a go?"

"I suppose so," Mabie returned impatiently, a trifle nettled at the other's iron-clad rule regarding his hour of dining.

Without further words the two men hurried from the office and to the Subway, where they boarded a train which two stations later pulled into the one at which Hamilton was to leave it.

"We'll be there as quickly as possible," was Mabie's parting remark, and a moment later he was being rapidly borne up-town.

Soon afterward he stepped from the cars and, hastily ascending to the street, walked to his house as rapidly as his dignity would permit.

He ran lightly up the steps and, inserting his key in the lock, pushed the door open, and entered the hallway.

As he did so a strong odor of escaping gas assailed his nostrils, and for a brief second he stood in indecision.

But it was only for an instant.

With one bound he covered the distance that separated him from the front

door, which he had closed after him, and flung it wide open. Then he dashed into the reception-room, and although the air there was heavy with the escaping gas, he did not stop, but hurried on to the library beyond, fear plainly written upon his features.

As he pushed aside the heavy portières that separated the two rooms his eyes took in the situation with one glance, and a little cry of alarm escaped him as he sprang forward and bent over the prostrate form of his wife, utterly regardless of the broken glass that littered the floor.

"Lillian—Lillian!" he cried, as he tore her collar from her neck.

But there was no response from the apparently lifeless body, and, in his fear of the worst, he staggered back in horror. In doing so, he glanced toward the chandelier from which the piece of pipe that had connected the gas-lamp with it was hanging. With one twist he stopped the flow of deadly fumes.

He then dashed from one window to the other, throwing them wide open; and, after doing this, hurried to his wife's side and, after lifting her gently, carried her to her room, the while imploring her to speak to him.

As he mounted the stairs he reached for her wrist and, with a sigh of relief, felt her pulse beating. Yet it was with grave misgivings that he laid her tenderly upon her bed and, turning, dashed out of the room and down the stairs, to the doctor who lived next door.

Fortunately, the physician was at home, and he hurried back with Mabie to the sick woman's bedside, and in a few moments she opened her eyes in response to his treatment.

"How did it happen?" her husband inquired anxiously.

Mrs. Mabie related the story in a few words.

She had been reading in the library, when she suddenly felt faint, and started toward a window. But everything seemed to become black, and she stumbled against the table, falling to the floor. That was the last she remembered.

"And, in doing so, you either knocked the gas-lamp off, or else caught in the gas tube," Mabie said thoughtfully.

"It's the gas that did the damage," the doctor informed them. "It was getting in its work while you were in the faint. It might have been—well, it's fortunate your husband arrived when he did."

"If Billy hadn't come to the office," Mabie remarked absently, "I wouldn't have been here. Perhaps you wouldn't, either," he added.

"It's more serious than you imagine, Mrs. Mabie—"

"Lillian," Mabie suddenly interrupted, "have you any idea what time it was when you fainted?"

"About ten minutes after five," she replied without hesitation. "I looked at the clock as I started toward the window."

Mabie turned toward his wife.

"Do you know what saved your life?" he inquired tenderly.

"No. What—"

"Our new phone," was the reply.

Mabie then went on to tell of his attempt to get a connection with his house.

"That was about a quarter after five," he informed her. "Even had I had the number, and been connected, you couldn't have answered it, and I'd have gone to the Waldorf, thinking you out. And all the time you'd be lying here—"

He stopped abruptly, and a nervous shudder passed over him, as he added: "I guess I'll telephone now, and tell Billy that when he finishes dining to come here, as we can't join him to-night. And, at the same time, I'll phone a caterer to send our dinner to us. We'll have it served here."

He laughed foolishly as he added: "I guess we'll keep the thing after to-night, although I vowed I'd have it taken out to-morrow."

THE AMERICAN GIRL.

Her feet upon the land of lands,
Between the centuries she stands;
Crowned with the dead years' legacy,
And in her hands—what is to be!

Frank Preston Smart.

Hunting Down Roxbury Station.

By ROBERT KEENE.

A matter of post-cards, a journey taken on the spur of the moment, and a surprise that was fairly paralyzing.

IT'S awful to sit watching the one man Fate sometimes elects to decide a matter of importance for you by his simple yes or no—to sit staring into his face, trying to read there a hint that will let you know beforehand what his decision is to be.

I know this, for so I sat in the office of the editor of the *Golden Magazine*—tense-nerved and frowningly watching his face one day not long ago while he was reading a manuscript of mine.

I studied his expressionless countenance—first with a relaxed, don't-care-what-you-think look upon my own face; then with an intently scowling glare that I hoped might burn into his brain the thought I repeated over and over in my mind: "You've got to take this; you can't turn it down."

For I wanted to sell the story he was reading; I wanted to place it, badly. And I had every reason to believe that I would.

I was something of a regular contributor to the magazine; my work had a market there. And this story in particular was really the best thing I had ever turned out.

The idea for it had been inspired (so it seemed to me). I had written and rewritten it till I could do no more to improve it. The thing was sure to appeal to the editor.

But I had worked upon it carefully, because I wanted it to do more than prove acceptable. I wanted it to strike the editorial mind as something that was better than good—my masterpiece.

For then my rate might be increased. I had sold my first story to this magazine at a cent a word. That had been my established rate of payment for the dozen other tales I had placed there since. And now I wanted a "raise."

I had worked for it—hard. This story was an example that I had tried to earn what I desired. And if the editor complimented me upon it when he was through—if he gave me the encouragement of that opening—I would demand an increase on all future stories.

And there was just one thing that might possibly stand between my demand and its granting—a thing that "galled" me whenever I thought of it.

That was Roxbury Station.

This was the name the editor and I had given to the person—mysteriously unknown—who for several months had been in the habit of writing unsolicited criticisms of the magazine into the office.

Who he was, what he was, neither the editor nor I knew. All we knew as to his identity was that the postal-cards upon which his criticisms were written came from Boston, postmarked "Roxbury Station."

We had guessed his sex from one postal, on which he had written a request that fewer stories with "the eternal girl dragged in" be printed in the magazine.

Beyond that the sender of the post-cards was a mysterious some one, unknown and never seen.

Yet I feared him—this man in Roxbury Station. For he had the power to keep me from the raise I wanted.

He had criticized a couple of stories of mine on one or two occasions. The criticism, coming directly to the editor, was not in the way of helping me in the eyes of the latter.

Every month the cards came. I had not been mentioned—my work had escaped the "knocks" of the anonymous critic—for three months.

But now, for all I could do to prevent it, I might be due for a slap or two from the stranger. The *Golden Magazine* for the present month had been on sale now for nearly a week. Perhaps a story of mine in the current number might have been criticized.

Just here the editorial arbiter of my destiny looked up from the story in his hands, and interrupted my train of thought by saying:

"This is pretty good. I'll take it. It's really—"

He stopped. The door opened.

An office-boy entered the room, walked to the desk beside me, and laid down a little pile of letters.

"The mail, sir!"

I started, and rudely stared at the half-dozen epistles toward which the editor was just reaching forth his hand.

Horrors! On top lay an ordinary postal-card, the address written in the hand of the man in Roxbury Station. I recognized it at a glance, for I had seen the cards often.

Fascinated, I watched the editor as he picked up this card and turned it over to the correspondence side. What had the anonymous critic written? Anything about me?

"You caught it this time." The editor looked up with a grin. "Here—read this."

I took the card with rueful face. What a time to have the thing delivered. Just when I felt sure that I was to get the opening to ask for bigger pay!

With flaming face I read the card. It was like the ones that had preceded it in form, if not in substance:

> To the Editor:
>
> "Carlotta's Cousin" is the silliest story I have ever read. So is "Tangled Together." Can't you buy stories by authors who know how to write better than the ones who are responsible for this trash?
>
> A Reader.

I tossed the card down on the desk with a provoked click of my tongue. The editor looked around at me, the grin still on his face, as he placed my accepted manuscript away in the drawer. There was some consolation in the fact that the man in Roxbury Station had not made him reject it, even if he had put a spoke in my wheel in another direction.

"Gave you a pretty thorough raking over the coals, didn't he?"

I gritted my teeth.

"Why doesn't he write to me?" I demanded angrily. "If he wants to knock, let him tell his troubles to me. My name is on the stories."

"Your *nom de plume*, you mean," the editor reminded me.

"Of course, my assumed name, I mean," I said impatiently. "But that's all he needs. If he'd write to the authors of the stories he doesn't happen to like, instead of to you, we'd be able to improve our work, perhaps—if we knew what he objected to."

My friend laughed out loud.

"Look at this latest card," I went on, with difficulty restraining an open exhibition of my wrath. "He doesn't say why my story isn't good; his criticism doesn't help me to make the next one any better. He just says 'Carlotta's Cousin' is the silliest thing he ever read."

"He's a reader of the magazine, you know," suggested the editor, indicating that I was to understand and respect the anonymous hammer-thrower's right as a purchaser to criticize the contents of his paid-for periodical.

"Well, at least he might sign himself," I argued, "instead of hiding behind the mysterious cloak of 'A Reader.'"

Again the editor laughed.

"What about you?" he asked. "You hide behind an assumed name yourself. All your stories are anonymous."

"But that's because the name I have taken is easier to remember than my own. It is a better advertisement, you know."

"Well, the man in Roxbury Station has a right to his opinion." The editor stood up and held out his hand.

I attempted to speak, and choked over my rage. Mumbling an inarticulate something, I shook hands and walked unsteadily out of the office, blinded a little by a wave of anger which surged over me overpoweringly at thought of what the man in Roxbury Station had done to hurt me.

"If I ever meet him," I thought wildly, "I'll pay him up for this. I'd just like to know who he is. I'd give a year of my life to be able to look him up now and give him one large piece of my mind."

But the idea of ever finding, or meeting, the stranger was preposterous. I did not know his name, what he looked like, where he was to be found—except, in the latter point, that I knew he lived

in Boston, near the Roxbury Station of the post-office there.

"If I only *could* run across him!" I continued my bitter ruminations as I walked along the street. "By George, I'd—I'd—"

I stopped short in my tracks, struck by a sudden, compelling thought. What was to hinder my going to Boston and trying to look up the man from Roxbury Station?

I was mad enough for it. My blood fairly boiled—it set my brain on fire. I made up my mind to do it. The *Golden Magazine* was published in a town not far distant from the Hub, so the fare wouldn't count for much in the scales.

In the next five minutes I had walked down to the station, and bought a ticket on a train that was ready to leave for Boston in a minute or two.

I cooled off as quickly as I had boiled over, to the point of doing anything so foolish as my present actions. Sitting there in the car, I called myself more kinds of an adjectived fool than I had ever had occasion to do before in my life.

Here I was, setting off on a wild-goose chase that couldn't possibly gain me anything. On the other hand, it might result in my discomfiture.

But my trip was paid for—both ways—and I would have to go on to the end of the journey.

How was I going to find the man in Roxbury Station? I didn't know his name. I didn't know what he looked like. I didn't know where, within a radius of ten blocks, he had a permanent address.

Yet here I was, starting out to find him—to give him a forcible piece of my mind.

What would be the first thing for me to do when I got to Boston? How should I go about locating my quarry? The only clue to his possible whereabouts was that he mailed his cards from the Roxbury Station district. And my whole case rested on conjecture.

Suppose I went to Roxbury Station and waited till he came along and mailed something, how would I know who he was if I saw him do just that?

He would have to mail a card to the *Golden Magazine*. I would have to see it in his hand, recognize it by the writing, in order to identify him. And he would not be writing one of his criticisms again until the magazine came out the next month—twenty days away from the present.

Besides that, he might not go directly to the Roxbury Station office to deposit his mail. He might post his correspondence from any one of a hundred letter-boxes in the Roxbury section.

The thing for me to do, I thought, as my train pulled into Boston, was to turn right around and come back home without delay.

But I had never been to Boston before, I remembered. Why not take advantage of being there now, and look the city over?

I decided to stay that night, and return home the following day. Accordingly, I sought out a hotel—one of the largest in town—and asked to be assigned to a room.

With my pen poised to sign the register, I looked at the name on the line above the one on which I was to write, doing so unconsciously.

And the pen dropped from my nerveless fingers as I started violently.

The name I read was "A. Reader, Boston."

The name of the man in Roxbury Station! Could I believe my eyes? Was it possible that I had found him?

Then, picking up the pen, with a smile for my silliness, I prepared to sign the register. I had forgotten, in my excitement, that the man I was after had no name that I knew. He simply signed himself to the cards I had read, "A Reader."

I looked once more at the name in the book. It was a queer coincidence, truly, that a man should have the real name that was the common one assumed by my critic. Especially, too, was it odd that I should see it, just when my head was full of—

Again I received a shock.

Looking at the signature that had aroused my curiosity, I detected something undeniably familiar in the handwriting.

If I was not mistaken—and surely I could not be—the name *had* been written

by the individual who lived in Roxbury Station!

"Where is this gentleman?" I asked the clerk, pointing out to him with a trembling forefinger the name before me. "Is he around the hotel anywhere, do you know?"

"Mr. Reader?" replied the clerk. "Front! Here, boy, page—"

He stopped, turning quickly to me.

"Never mind. There's Mr. Reader there. See him? The tall man in the brown derby, smoking a cigar over by the door."

I wheeled and looked. I saw a tall, broad-shouldered man of middle-age, leaning carelessly against a pillar of the lobby, about twenty feet distant.

"That's Mr. Reader, is it?" I asked the clerk carelessly, my lips tightening in anger.

"Yes, sir," he answered. "Shall I call him over?"

"No," I said quickly. "I'll speak to him over there—in a minute."

I moved off a few steps and began to think. I was looking for a man in Boston, whose only name I knew was "A Reader." Here was a man of that name. Could he be the one I was so assiduously seeking?

Was it possible—the idea dawned on me—that the man in Roxbury Station had signed his real name to the cards; that his name *was* "A. Reader"?

I could not stand the suspense any longer. I walked over to him.

"I beg your pardon," I began.

"Did you speak to me?" and he wheeled quickly.

"Yes, sir, I did," I announced firmly. "Is your name 'A. Reader?'"

"It is," the man answered curiously. "Adolphus Reader."

I swallowed hard, and screwed up my courage.

"Are you in the habit of carrying on a one-sided correspondence with the editor of the *Golden Magazine?*" I went on boldly.

Mr. Reader's face fell into a smile.

"I write to them once in a while," he answered. "It's a good little magazine—in spots. Sometimes there's a story or two in it that I don't care for. And, since I've paid my money, when I don't like what I get I write in to them, and say so without mincing matters and seeking no advice."

I glowered at him.

"Would you be interested in knowing that I am one of the writers on that magazine?"

The man's eyes did light up as he looked at me.

"Yes, I would be interested in knowing that," he answered quickly; "for, if you are a writer for the magazines, maybe I can get you to help me out of a difficulty."

He had me staring at him with open mouth by this time.

"Help you?" I stammered.

"It's like this," he continued. "Come over here and sit down while I tell you the whole story.

"I'm a lawyer, and I've been left the task of getting a sixty-thousand-dollar legacy to a man I can't find. I know the man's name—it's Harrison Carew Jones—and his business is story-writing, but I don't know where to find—"

I fell back in my chair. My name is Harrison Carew Jones—I am a story-writer! And somebody had left me sixty—thousand—dollars! For a moment I could not realize it.

"I thought, you know, that I would go around to all the magazines in New York and ask if they knew this man I'm after—"

"Mr. Reader," I broke in wildly, "I'm the man you want. You need look no farther."

I proved it to him—easily—in the next half-hour. And then I rose and said:

"I came here to give you a piece of my mind for knocking me behind my back—by writing under an assumed name to my editor. But your name was not assumed, as the one I write under is. So, you see, if you had come to New York to find me, you couldn't have done it. Nobody in the magazine-world knows my right name well enough to remember it.

"I've had enough of *noms de plume,*" I finished. "Henceforth I'll write under nothing but the name by which people can find me, for fear I may come near losing another sixty thousand dollars. And as for you, Mr. A. Reader, you're my friend for life."

A DRESS-SUIT AFFAIR.

By H. E. TWINELLS.

Helping out his landlady and running himself into snags that grew thicker and more annoying until—but the story will divulge the rest.

"GOING to give it to the Salvation Army?"

I put the question to the boarding-house keeper, as I passed her in the hall, sorting over the contents of a trunk she had kept for two years in lieu of two weeks' rent unpaid by some luckless lodger.

"I guess so," she frowned. "Nothing seems to be worth much, except the trunk itself."

I paused for a moment to look at the miscellaneous assortment she dragged out.

Everything was rather well darned, but all were old and worn.

She drew out a dress-suit from the bottom and held it up.

"Ought to be able to realize something on that," I suggested.

"Oh, these old-clothes men never give you anything. I couldn't get more than fifty cents for it."

"Fifty cents!" I cried, picking up the garments and inspecting them carefully. "Why, that seems to be a pretty good suit. Made in London, it says here. Name of a fashionable Conduit Street tailor. I'll bet that's worth money."

"Probably cost sixty dollars. I'd be lucky to get a cent on the dollar," she replied. "I've tried it before. These old-clothes men want something for nothing, and a whole lot at that."

A brilliant idea came to me. I flushed a little with the novelty of having a real thought, but soon composed myself enough to suggest:

"I'll bet I could get five dollars for it at some second-hand store down-town." I made the estimate low, for the suit looked good to me.

"I'll give you every cent over one dollar that you realize on it," she offered suddenly, thrusting the garments into my arms, with the eagerness of a Black Hander trying to rid himself of a bomb.

I figured it out quickly. In my state of finances, four dollars looked pretty good for a day's work. I could live three days on that.

"Why not?" my mind suddenly suggested.

She urged me again. I looked at the suit. Surely, anybody would be willing to pay ten dollars for it. I figured that any man who needed a dress-suit would have enough money to pay the dealer a good profit.

Yes, there was no doubt in my mind but that I could sell the thing to advantage; maybe make nine dollars out of it, instead of four.

"It's a bargain," I replied quickly, wrapping up the bundle.

I took it down-town with me directly and it lodged beside my desk till noon. Everybody asked me what was in it, and before the lunch hour I had contrived a dozen stories to satisfy them; for I felt a little cheap at being in the business of peddling old clothes.

But at noon I stuffed the thing under my arm in my most nonchalant manner and sauntered out as though I were bound on a mission to the poor, instead of going out to see how much I could realize on a discarded dress-suit.

I walked over to Seventh Avenue, having often noticed that that street was lined with second-hand clothes dealers between Thirty-Sixth and Fortieth.

I didn't let my fancy run away with me entirely. I was very conservative, and figured that ten dollars was a fair price for the suit, considering everything.

At the first place I strolled in and put down my bundle. The dealer looked up at me with a calculating eye and queried:

"Something to sell?"

"Yes; and I won't give it away either. It's a dress-suit, cost sixty dollars, made in London—"

His face slipped and dropped forty degrees. I wondered why the mention

of the fact that it was made in London caused him that look of pain.

He glanced up through his bushy eyebrows and replied:

"Oh, well, I'll look at it, *anyway.*"

I hurriedly undid the bundle. Someting in his manner made me nervous. He seemed displeased at the very outset, and I was determined that he should never have it for less than ten dollars.

He picked up the suit and gave one contemptuous look at it.

"Old country!" he sniffed. Then added, "Too small."

I grabbed the suit from his hands, wrapped it up, and haughtily withdrew. It was perfectly evident that he did not appreciate a good thing when he saw it. Probably he was afraid I would hold the suit too dearly, and, therefore, did not attempt to bargain for it.

I decided to make myself very plain to the next buyer, and so I stepped into a neighboring store with the abrupt offer:

"I've got a good suit here; I'll sell it for ten dollars. It's worth sixty. Fine dress-suit, made in London—"

This dealer's face made a rapid slide and I looked at him in astonishment as I started to unwrap the bundle.

"Don't do it!" he cried. "Don't do it! I don't want to see the suit. Did you think you'd got into a relief-station by mistake? We don't give charity here. This is a business establishment. You will please to walk outside with your ten-dollar suit, *made in London.*"

With the scorn of a prima donna for a stage-hand I lifted my head above his hat, and my nose above the smell of his shop, and walked out.

For the first time I understood that it was clearly a disadvantage to be carrying a suit made in London.

So I said nothing about this at the next place. I mentioned no price; merely laid out the goods and allowed them to talk for themselves.

Clothes were never more eloquent. The dealer interpreted, in rapid, almost understandable fashion.

"This suit is no good. It's the kind they wore in the Ark. Those good old days are passed, and I have no use for it. It is small, almost child's size. It was made in the old country. It is no good. It is worse than that."

At this third rebuff I became meek. My pride suddenly deserted me.

"How much will you give for it?" I asked.

He smiled, and looked at me.

"A quarter," was his offer.

"A quarter!" I cried in astonishment.

He turned away with a look of disdain, and I wrapped up the suit again; I had become quite practised in the art.

The next man had the same story about the suit, only told with a decided German accent and a little more contempt.

When I asked him finally what he would give for it, he replied quickly with the insulting question: "Vat vill you gif me if I take it off your hands?"

Of course I left the shop, after giving him a piece of my mind. It took four more determined dealers to convince me that the suit was utterly worthless, on account of its small size and the fact that it was cut on an old, old, old country pattern.

At last I got down to offering the suit for the cloth that was in it. I could not interest any of the others in that. They would merely glance at the suit and throw it back to me. I began to feel that I was blacklisted among the old-clothes dealers.

At last I got down to bragging about the silk lining and the price the buttons would bring. Nobody seemed to believe me, though I've been told I have an honest face, and am good-hearted.

In sheer desperation I finally mopped the sweat from my brow and asked one dealer if he would not give me one dollar for the cloth.

"Yes, I will *not,*" he answered abruptly.

"Fifty cents?" I offered.

"No, not ten cents! Take it out of here!"

Seeing wrath in his eye I departed at once. It took three more dealers before I was absolutely assured that the suit was utterly worthless.

Then I went boldly into the last shop in the row and asked the man, with my best manner, if he would accept the dress-suit, and take all responsibility, in exchange for my undying gratitude.

He shoved the suit under my arm and me out at the door.

Next I returned to one of the shops and offered to give the suit away. Noth-

ing doing. Nobody would take it. They assured me it was worth nothing, and grew suspicious when I pleaded with them, one after another, just to take the suit and throw it in the rag pile.

I guess they thought it was infected with smallpox, or that I was trying to get rid of stolen goods.

Anyway, nobody would take it. I tried to give it to a newsboy.

"Nothin' doin'," he drawled, backing away from the bundle. "I got stuck on a baby in a bundle dat a guy was tryin' to give away once. But, never again."

It was getting close to my time to return to the office. I couldn't go back with that bugbear, that Jonah.

Suddenly an inspiration seized me. Ahead I saw a refuse-can. In one leap I was upon it and had thrown the bundle in, turned quickly, braced my shoulders and taken a deep breath.

At last I was free.

Just then a heavy hand was clapped down on my shoulder. I turned to look into the soulful eyes of an Irish cop.

"Come back here!" he cried. "You're too strong on the getaway. Where would ye be afther goin'?"

"Back to work," I answered, growing cold.

"Ye'll go back to the refuse-can an' show me what you're abandonin' on this here strate corner," he replied.

When I proved to him that it was nothing but a harmless suit of clothes, and not a baby, as he suspected, he laughed, clapped me heartily on the shoulder; shoved the bundle of clothes underneath my arm and bade me be gone on my way in peace.

There I was again with the bundle. I didn't carry it with grace as I passed down the block in full view of the grinning clothes dealers that had turned me down.

I imagined myself going through life with that horrible bundle under my arm. I imagined everything. It was the most awful five minutes I ever put in.

Suddenly, as I turned toward the office, doggedly holding the bundle, an idea struck me. I let the bundle slip from my arm, close to a show-window where nobody would notice, and hurried on without looking back.

I hadn't gone ten steps when a shout behind me caused me to turn. I saw one of the old-clothes dealers running up to me with the bundle and crying:

"Here! Here! Come back! You dropped it!"

I couldn't run away and make a scene, so I halted till he came up. There was no pity in his eye as he handed the parcel back to me, and I recognized him as the man whom I had contemptuously turned down at first for offering me a quarter for the suit.

As soon as this realization struck me I jumped at him as my last hope of refuge in time of storm. His store was close at hand, and without a word I rushed back to it and we entered together.

"Here!" I said, spreading the suit out before him. "You offered me a quarter for this. It's yours. Take it."

"I was only foolin'," he grinned. "I wanted to show you how little it was really worth."

"Then you won't pay a quarter for it?"

"No, not two cents."

I was desperate. The thing had got on my nerves. I was beginning to think hysterically of nice lonesome docks where one could slip into the black water unnoticed, etc.

"Will you take it as a gift?" I cried frantically.

He puffed out his lips and looked at the thing condescendingly.

"Look it over well," I urged, my heart sinking even then. "You can sell it for rags."

"Yes, I might do that," he said slowly, picking up the vest and fingering the material. "I might be able to use some of the lining."

I hoped but faintly. Still, he was the only man that had taken enough interest even to feel the cloth in the vest.

"Oh, do take it!" I cried.

Just then I heard a crinkle as of paper, and the dealer's mouth was open as he started to say:

"No, I guess I don't—"

He stopped suddenly at the sound of the crinkle. I noticed that his fingers feeling the lining stopped, too.

"Yes. I'll take it. Here's the quarter!" he cried suddenly, diving into his pocket.

"Not so quick, my friend!" I yelled,

grabbing at the vest with both hands, for I understood it all the moment he had.

The flimsy vest ripped as we pulled in opposite directions, and there came to light four twenty-dollar bills sewed up inside the lining. I grabbed at them, swooped them into my palm before he had a chance to get ahead of me.

Then I tore through the door, praising my luck that I had caught the faint crinkle of the bills as he had examined the waistcoat, and had jumped at the meaning of it.

He was too surprised to chase me. Besides, the property was mine.

That night I asked the landlady, with trembling fear, if there was any chance of the man who owned the trunk coming back.

"No," she answered. "He disappeared. Some say he answered the description of a dead man that was found about the same time. I held the trunk for the rent, but he never came back to pay me what he owed."

"How much was that?" I asked.

"Six dollars."

With all the magnanimity in the world, I counted into her hand seven dollars.

"This," I explained, "is six dollars for the rent, and the one dollar coming to you on the suit I sold this morning for you."

She stared at me in surprise.

"Then you got a good price for the suit? Why do you pay his rent, too?"

"I made good money out of the suit," I answered, feeling that, as she had been fully repaid, there was no occasion for me to go into details.

She still looked at me in an awestruck manner. A day or two afterward she came around and gave me the unfortunate lodger's trunk. I had to accept it. I'm rather glad I did. It always reminds me of the one lucky stroke I've had in this life.

I'm sitting on it now as I write. The eighty dollars didn't last long; and, although it wasn't much, it bought an engagement-ring for a certain lady I know. We're going to take the old trunk on our honeymoon next week.

Any time after the fifteenth of the month we'll be at home; come around and see the trunk that contained the dress-suit waistcoat that contained the eighty dollars that bought the engagement-ring that—

My wife-to-be says it's a regular House-that-Jack-built story. Nevertheless, it's true. If you don't believe it come around any time after the fifteenth and my wife will show you where I tore the lining out of the trunk to find some more twenty-dollar bills; but, needless to say, they weren't there.

HIS STUMBLING-BLOCK.

BY FORREST HALSEY.

Why the bank messenger wasn't promoted, with an account of his day-dream that was tangibly shattered.

WE did not realize it—no one realized it—but the thing that stood in his way in life was a pair of spectacles.

"No, Mr. Sharp," the cashier said to the head bookkeeper, "that young Blake will not do to have about the directors' room, and as for answering the president's bell—what would Mr. Chipin say if we gave him a stupid-looking boy like that? No! Keep him as a messenger; that's all he is good for."

The cashier thought he spoke from a deep insight into character. In reality, his opinion was formed by the spectacles.

The two straight steel prongs going back over the boy's somewhat prominent ears gave his face a meek, humble look, destructive of all appearance of alertness. A smart young fellow answered the president's bell and smoked the president's cigarettes behind the safe, while Blake trudged the streets, peering through thick lenses at the lists of notes to be collected or coupons paid.

But he was alert and ambitious, for all

that. His chance would come soon, he knew. He was absorbed in the work, and on fire to know every detail. He had learned the whole list of the bank's correspondents just from hearing them shouted from clerk to clerk as he sat on the messengers' bench outside the partition.

But that partition was a gateless wall to Blake. Year after year he sat on the messengers' bench, while new boys passed from a seat beside him through the partition to high stools, high collars, and, eventually, higher salaries. Still he sat patiently, small, meek-looking, peering through his spectacles, waiting for his chance.

But the chance did not come. How could any one realize what he could do when his appearance made the offering to him of an opportunity seem hopeless?

By and by he began to realize painfully that there was something the matter with him. Perhaps the stuff was not in him, after all. Perhaps he had nothing better in him than to trudge the streets year after year, asking supercilious young men in cashiers' windows to pay duly matured drafts and coupons. You see, Blake began to follow general opinion as to himself, as we all do, sooner or later.

"Old four eyes," the graceless youths of the long lines on coupon days called him. He was still a young man, but the heavy steel spectacles added a good ten years to his apparent age.

As "old four eyes," he tramped Broad, New, and Pine Streets, winter and summer, panic and boom. The big spectacles with the steel prongs regularly poked themselves into cashiers' windows year after year. Year after year he sat on the messengers' bench, looking at the partition that seemed to grow higher and higher with the passing of time. At night he went up-town to his furnished room in Harlem, and after his twenty-five-cent dinner he would stroll the streets alone.

Sometimes the gay young people going along arm-in-arm would giggle or grin at the curious, near-sighted stare through the spectacles. They made their wearer look "queer," and youth has a contempt for "queerness." Blake, therefore, walked alone.

He was sensitive. The spectacles, unknown to him, separated him from his kind—barred him from youth as well as from success.

"He looks as if a mouse would scare him to death," he overheard a girl upon whom he had called say. "He certainly is queer."

Blake never went to see her again. He dropped the attempt to mingle with his fellows as he dropped the hope of promotion.

He had one dissipation—he was a dreamer. Day after day, as he plodded the streets, his mind was far away, reveling in adventures of which he was the hero.

Sometimes it was a heroic saving of the bank vaults from robbery, again it was some panic at the bank, into which he entered cool and calm in time to save the day, while the president wrung his hand, the directors cheered, and the clerks, to whom he had given their first lessons as messenger-boys, looked on in astonishment.

But the most pleasing picture of all was the one in which he saved the president's life. Yes, that was the best one. It varied; in fact, the picture was never quite clear.

Sometimes he grappled with a maniac, again it was a fierce crook with whom he struggled; but the end was always the same—the president shook his hand, and in trembling tones said: "Blake, you have saved my life."

The reason for this mental state was not far to seek. Blake really had an active mind, and his life was a treadmill of routine, thus leaving the major portion of his brain free to rove by itself.

One day in the summer Blake sat, as usual, on the messengers' bench, waiting for calls. It was a hot, drowsy day; but there was nothing drowsy about the bank.

Files of excited, sweating men passed in and out of the president's rooms; telephone-bells kept up a ceaseless jingle; bank messengers, brokers' messengers, messengers of all kinds, poured in from and out into the long corridors. Down the street the Stock Exchange roared.

The mightiest bull market of history was rocketing to the skies. In certain quiet offices of conservative men words of warning were being whispered. Here

and there a grave, anxious face bent over the tape.

But this was rare; for the most part every one was jubilant. Stocks had had an enormous rise, therefore they were going to rise still further. However, this was not the opinion of the president of Blake's bank, who stood talking with his secretary, holding the tape in his hand as it spun from the madly chattering ticker.

"One hundred and sixty-five for Niobara and Western," the great man read from the tape, "and it's not worth one hundred and twenty. How much have I, Judson?"

"Five hundred shares, sir," replied the secretary.

"Well, tell Hamon & Black to sell them at the market," directed the great man. "I am going over to a directors' meeting."

The clerk bowed, and went to the telephone. The wire was busy, and the great man had departed before Hamon & Black responded. Then the clerk discovered that Hamon & Black refused absolutely to sell Niobara and Western unless the stock certificates were delivered to them in hand.

He was surprised; but there was no chance to telephone his chief. Blake was called, the stock given to him, the errand explained, and he was told to deliver the stock to Hamon & Black at once.

There was still an hour before the closing of the exchange. The offices of Hamon & Black were a short way down the street, and Blake started off, the package held tightly in his hand.

The street was crowded, but that did not prevent Blake from indulging in a reverie. Soon he was engrossed. He engaged in a mighty fancy-struggle with an armed robber, while the president lay overcome with a blow from a black-jack.

The robber was down at last, the president unbound. The old man arose, took the young fellow's hand, and said in trembling tones: "Mr. Blake, you have saved my life!"

Crash! For one dazed and fleeting moment, the blinded and sprawling Blake thought that the robber had actually come to life and knocked him down.

Splinters of crystal seemed flying through a haze. Gradually the haze lifted and became a mist, which remained, but showed dim forms looking down at him as he lay on the narrow sidewalk, his shoulders against an iron railing.

"What is the matter, you dope?" demanded a harsh voice. "Can't you see where you're going?"

Fingers began to feel Blake's body for broken bones. Voices inquired what had happened. The mist seemed full of blurred faces.

"Why, a newspaper-wagon ran into him," explained the harsh voice.

"It's fierce how fast them wagons do drive," said some one else.

"Ah, he could have seen it if he hadn't been dopin'," continued the first voice. "It knocked him clear upon the sidewalk against the railing. But nothing's broke but his glasses."

The dim blue form of the policeman rose from the examination.

Blake got slowly to his feet. He felt sick and dazed. The deep mist seemed to enclose him on all sides. The day had become suddenly dark, although he saw faint yellow patches that he supposed was sunshine on the dim-looking buildings about him.

"Here's what's left of your spec's," said the policeman, putting some fragments of glass into the young man's hand.

Blake took them.

"There's an oculist across the street," went on the policeman; then, seeing Blake was still dazed, he took his arm.

"Shall I show you?" he asked.

Blake nodded.

Followed by a goodly section of the crowd, they crossed the street.

"It will take fully an hour to get new lenses," said the oculist, after examining the bits of broken glass. "Of course, you don't want this frame any more?" he added, holding something out to Blake. "It has one prong broken."

Blake shook his head, and sat down. The oculist began work. The policeman departed.

For about five minutes there was quiet in the little shop. Then the oculist heard a yell that made his glass fall out of his eye.

"The package!" shouted Blake suddenly, jumping up from his chair.

"Where's the package?" And he rushed blindly into the street.

The oculist calmly continued his work. He was used to the actions of people who had broken their glasses.

Blake's heart was like lead as he stumbled across the street. He found the place where he had fallen, dimly recognizing it by the iron railing. He began to grope about, but no yellow patch greeted his straining eyes. The sweat poured from his body; he turned faint as he realized that he had lost the president's package.

Blindly he groped on, searching curb and gutter.

The package was gone!

Trembling and sick at heart, he heard the quarter-hour strike. Still he searched, going down the street, across it, attracting curious eyes as he groped.

Suddenly the bells of Trinity began to chime three o'clock. The exchange was closed. The time for the delivery of the stock was over.

That meant he must go back to the bank and tell them that he had lost the president's stock. He leaned against the iron rail, weak and trembling.

There was an unusual excitement about him. Newsboys roared extras. Excited bits of conversation from passing men fell on his dumb ears. The streets were becoming jammed with people who formed into masses, looking up at the Stock Exchange, talking excitedly.

Blake did not notice them; all he knew was that he had lost the president's stock, and that it was three o'clock. The exchange had closed.

"Say," said a voice at his elbow. He looked, and saw the dim blue of a policeman's coat. "That feller across the street is beckoning to you."

"Where? Who?" cried Blake in excitement.

Could it be that some one had found the package? The policeman took him by the arm and guided him across the way.

"Say, your glasses are ready," said the optician, who had kept a curious eye on the young man from a seat in the window of his shop.

Sick with disappointment, Blake turned and walked away.

"Hey," cried the oculist, "stop him, officer. He ordered these glasses. You know he did."

"Sure!" replied the policeman, laying a heavy hand on Blake's arm. "Take your glasses and pay for 'em like a gentleman."

Dumbly the young man came back. The oculist deftly snapped a pair of eyeglasses on his nose.

Instantly the world changed to Blake. He saw faces, clear lines of buildings, bright sunlight. The mist was gone, and with it his sense of absolute helplessness.

"There," said the oculist, "that looks something like."

Blake paid for the glasses, and then turned alertly to the policeman.

"Officer," he said, "I have lost a package in an envelope of the St. Regis Bank. I lost it when I was knocked down."

"The St. Regis Bank?" repeated the officer.

"Yes."

"What kind of a package?"

"A thick yellow one."

The officer reached in his coat and took out a thick yellow package.

"Is this it?" he said.

"Yes," cried Blake joyfully. "Where did you find it?"

"I took it out of your hand when you were knocked down."

"Why didn't you give it to me, then?"

"Because I forgot it, just like you did," grinned the officer. Blake now saw that he was quite youthful.

"This is my first day on the force," he explained, thereby proving himself a very young officer indeed.

Blake smiled, then he remembered, and groaned, "It's too late!"

All the way back to the bank his footsteps seemed to say "too late." The finding of the package made matters worse.

How could he explain the hour, the whole hour of his search, the precious hour while the exchange was still open?

Suppose the stock should fall to-morrow—it had been very high to-day; it could not keep at the present figure. Then the president would lose money, and he—he would lose his job.

"Panic in Wall Street!" shouted a newsboy, rushing by him. He caught the lad by the arm.

"Huge Panic in Wall Street," he read

in great letters. "Stocks Smash to Pieces in Last Fifteen Minutes Before Closing."

He took the paper and felt for a penny. He had no money. His glasses had taken his last cent.

"Aw, gimme back me paper, yuh cheap guy!" cried the urchin, snatching it from his grasp.

Blake went on. It was over, then. The president would probably lose thousands, and he would have been in ample time to sell the stock. Blake would be discharged, and his glasses had taken his last money.

He groaned at the sight of the president's motor-car as he mounted the steps of the bank.

He had scarcely entered the place when the president's secretary, coatless, wild-eyed, sweating, and disheveled, came flying out of the magnate's office.

"Blake," he screamed on seeing him, "what did they sell the stock for? I can't get them on the wire. What did they sell it for? The old man's in there, nearly wild."

"I—I didn't—I couldn't deliver it," stammered the young man, white to the lips.

The secretary seized him in a mighty grasp and dragged him past the astonished clerks, past the gaping customers, into the office of the president.

"He didn't deliver it," he shouted to the president, who towered, eyes blazing, behind his desk.

There was a dead pause. Blake felt his knees begin to give way beneath the awful glare. Then some one seized his hand.

"Mr. Blake, you have saved my life," said the president in a trembling voice.

Blake looked up in dumb amazement. There was a twinkle in the hard, gray eyes which, as they looked at the young man, vanished, and a puzzled expression took its place.

The face that the president saw did not look at all like the face he had been accustomed to see. It was rather good-looking; a pair of smart eye-glasses gave an air of alertness to the keen eyes.

"Mr. Blake," said the president, "you showed great judgment in not delivering that stock. You took a great responsibility by withholding it. I did not know myself that Niobara and Western was cornered until I left the directors' meeting. However, I suppose when you saw the market smashing, and Niobara rising, you drew your inference, which I regret to say my secretary did not do. I like young men like that. What was the last quotation on Niobara and Western?" he asked, turning to his subdued secretary.

"One thousand, sir. There is not a share to be had in the street except yours."

The president turned to Blake and went on:

"You have made me a fortune, sir. I am pleased with you. My eye is on you now. You will find a check in your envelope Saturday."

Blake bowed, adjusted his eye-glasses, and, laying a yellow envelope on the table, left the room.

WIRES AWRY.

By FRITZ KROG.

What happened when I consented to aid my brother-in-law in the realms of invention.

MY wife's brother, Oscar, was a young man of unbounded enthusiasm and illimitable ideas. He had been manufacturing the "thing" in my garden-house at odd hours, nights mostly, throughout the whole summer.

Oscar's singleness of purpose and terrible energy were admirable traits for a young man to possess. It was unfortunate that Oscar's father did not recognize them.

Father Glencoe was not blind to all his son's admirable qualities; but he was vigorously inclined to think that they were misapplied. Mr. Glencoe did not want Oscar to go down in history as a

great inventor; he wanted Oscar to go down into Wall Street and be a great bull or a greater bear. That's why Oscar built the "thing" secretly in our garden-house.

The technical name of the thing was a "radio-wireless telephone." In spite of its name, it was mostly wires.

I was to learn very soon that these wires were not to be strung out on poles in a respectable fashion, but were to be coiled around the unfortunate operator. Besides the wires, there were brass knobs and little rods and poles and cells and rubber tubes, and a great many other things which no one except Oscar understood.

One Saturday noon, when I came home from the city—we live in a small town in New Jersey about thirty minutes from New York—my wife was mysteriously absent. I found her with Oscar in the garden-house.

"Will," she cried excitedly, "the great day has come!"

I was expectantly silent.

"I want to try the radio-wireless today," Oscar put in.

"Go ahead," I replied. "But don't set anything afire."

Then I started off.

"Wait!" cried my wife, clutching my arm.

"We need your help," said Oscar. "I want you to operate one end from your house. And I am going to rig up the other end at father's. He won't come in this afternoon, and I sha'n't have another chance like this for a long time."

"But," I objected, "I don't know anything about the thing. I don't know how to make it talk."

"It's very simple," Oscar replied, "and unless anybody can operate it, it will be a failure. Every successful invention must be fool-proof."

"You are the only one who can help Oscar," added my wife reproachfully.

Thus appealed to, I consented. I had my misgivings, and, as we went along in the experiments, it will be seen I had some grounds for them.

Oscar proceeded at once to give me the necessary instructions for using the radio-wireless telephone. He explained that his outfit was so designed that a man could carry it around with him. I thought he would be a very busy man, who tried to carry it, and a pretty strong one as well.

"And so," Oscar went on, "in order to make a true test, I am going to fasten the radio-wireless telephone to you, and you can walk around to different places while you are telephoning."

I protested vigorously at that. I had absolutely no desire to walk around, and thought it entirely unnecessary. But Oscar declared that there could be no test if I did not walk around.

My wife said I was a brute, and, though I would much prefer being called a brute than being made a beast of burden, I finally had to consent to be strapped into the "thing."

When they started hanging that radio-wireless telephone outfit on me I found there were a great many more parts to it than I had at first judged. It is impossible to describe everything they attached to my person. A list of them would almost fill a wholesale hardware-store's catalogue.

There were straps that went over my shoulders with a heavy load of coils and cells on each strap. There was a belt that went around my waist with more coils and things hanging to it. There were buttons to press, and handles to turn, and levers to twist, and rods to hold, and others to be slid to and fro.

Lastly, there was a brass rod strapped to my back and around my neck, so that it reared itself over my head like a flagpole, and from the top of this a lot of fine wires were strung down to a mass of coils at my belt.

I held the transmitter in my left hand, and the receiver was fastened to my ears.

"Now," said Oscar in triumph when I was completely covered, "be careful not to sit down. If you do, you will smash the thingumajig induction-coil. And don't touch anything when the messages begin to arrive. If you do, you will get a shock."

There were a hundred more instructions which were flung at me while Oscar gathered up his end of the radio-wireless telephone and prepared to move away. Even before he left I was filled with a great desire to rest somewhere. When he had gone my wife looked at me with frightened eyes, and then began to laugh.

"You needn't laugh," I said. "You got me into this."

Oscar had told us that it would probably be a half-hour or so before he would send the first message. He would notify me by causing a little buzzer suspended on my chest to buzz. That was to be my cue for saying "Hallo!"

Before that half-hour was up I felt as though I were buried under a mountain of junk. Those little wires began to tickle my neck, and when I found that I couldn't scratch I began to itch in several other places. In a short time I was itching all over.

I told my wife to scratch me. But she wouldn't touch me. She said she was afraid of getting a shock.

When the half-hour was up and there was no buzz, I began to grow impatient. I tried walking around, but that was too much work. So I just stood still and waited.

At last the little buzzer buzzed. At the same time there was a lot of other unaccountable humming and clicking. And then my wife screamed.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"There's a blue light on top of the pole!" she exclaimed.

The information startled me so that I absent-mindedly put my hand over my head to feel for the light. Of course, that was foolish. Because the pole was too high to reach the top.

When I got my hand up in some way the wires twisted themselves around my wrist, and I couldn't pull it down. At the same time something seemed to sting me in the back of my neck.

I jumped and yelled and reached up with the other hand. When my fingers touched there was a crackling sound at my finger-tips; and they too, began to sting.

"Oh, oh, oh!" screamed my wife. "There are blue sparks in your hair, and your hands are spitting green fire."

I began to dance around and reach for things with my free hand. Everything I touched seemed to burst out into blue flame and more stings.

"Send for Oscar, quick!" I yelled.

But my wife was too frightened to listen. She picked up a pail of water and threw it over me.

She should not have done that. The water, I learned afterward, only helped out the stinging process. When my clothes were soaked I was stinging everywhere—in all the places that I had only itched before.

I couldn't stand that. I felt as though I had fallen into a bee-hive, and without any more debate I started off to my father-in-law's house.

That was three blocks away, and I made a record-breaking sprint for a man who carried the weight I did. My wife followed at my heels.

In crossing the lawn a clothes-line caught me under the chin. But nothing seemed to discourage the blue sparks. Oscar's receiving apparatus had been built on too hardy lines.

On our way we picked up a large following of children and dogs. There were also a number of grown-up spectators, who thought that my wife was chasing me.

They grinned, and probably thought it great sport. I was told afterward that the apparatus which I carried was a mystery to everybody, especially the pole sticking in the air over my head.

Our groceryman, who saw the flight, told my wife later that he thought I carried the remains of an umbrella, which, he assumed, she had rammed down the back of my coat.

As we dashed wildly along, the pole suddenly caught in an overhanging branch. If my wife had not run into me from behind and knocked me into an upright position, I would have fallen on the back of my head. The jar which I received loosened the pole, and I was able to keep on. But not without a fresh decoration; for the pole, in some manner, had dragged most of my coat up around the back of my neck.

In spite of all my encumbrances, when I arrived at the Glencoes' I executed a flying leap over the iron fence. I won many admirers among the small boys for acrobatic feats.

I dashed up the steps and rang the bell. But before I had an answer I smelled something burning in the region of the small of my back. Here was good cause for fresh activity.

I rushed away from the front door with the vague notion in my mind that I could effect a quicker entrance by the

rear. Luckily, the back door was open, and without any formal lingering at the threshold I leaped inside.

In galloping madly through the kitchen that pole hitched itself into a towel-rack which, along with the towels, joined the rest of the paraphernalia. There were also some other things that clattered and clashed behind me as I hastily left the place.

At last I found Oscar. He was up in the attic, decked out as I was, except that I had gone him one better in annexing the towel-rack and the towels. He stared at me in shocked surprise.

"Why," he exclaimed, "what's the matter?"

"Matter?" I shouted. "You get this infernal thing off of me, or you'll soon see—"

Words failed me.

"You spoiled my tests," said Oscar disgustedly, "and you have smashed the apparatus."

I had a hard time swallowing my anger. But I held my peace, and only glowered at him, while he glowered at me.

I was still debating whether or not I should say something nasty, or attack Oscar with my fists, when the attic-door opened and Mr. Glencoe entered the room.

Mr. Glencoe's eyes nearly popped out of his head when he caught sight of us.

"Well," he said at last, "what kind of fool monkey business is this? The whole house seems demoralized, and there is a big crowd outside."

I knew Oscar was in for it now, and I decided that Mr. Glencoe was just in his harsh opinions of his son's genius.

"It's a radio-wireless telephone outfit," replied Oscar belligerently.

Mr. Glencoe promptly began to dance up and down and get red in the face.

"So," he exploded, "radio-wireless telephone—"

Then he clapped his hands on his head and stared so wildly at Oscar that we thought the old man had lost his mind.

"Radio-wireless telephone?" he demanded hoarsely. "Did you say that?"

"Yes," Oscar answered.

Mr. Glencoe groaned.

"I bought ten thousand dollars' worth of stock," Mr. Glencoe went on, "in a wireless telephone company yesterday morning."

"Who sold it to you?" asked Oscar.

"Withus & Co.," Mr. Glencoe growled. "What difference does it make?"

"Difference?" yelled Oscar, beginning to jig so that I thought he, too, had gone mad. "Difference? Withus & Co. are the people who are selling my stock, my radio-wireless telephone stock. We formed a stock company two months ago, and I own three-fourths of the stock in my own name."

Mr. Glencoe nearly choked, and fell to coughing. At last he got his voice.

"Then," he said weakly, "I have bought my son's stock in a bunco-game."

"No," Oscar replied. "Your money is well invested, because you will find out that this radio-wireless telephone is a success."

And so it was. In the course of time, when people began talking of Oscar along with Marconi and De Forest, we liked to refer to the original tests in which I took such an active part.

KNOWLEDGE.

BECAUSE she stepped in my heart one day,
Where never a step before might win,
I know what grace fills an empty place
When the Well Beloved comes in.

Because she went from my heart one day,
I know as never another one
The lonely gloom of a crowded room
When the Well Beloved has gone.

Theodosia Garrison.

FOR THE HONOR OF BILLY.

By BURKE JENKINS.

After-hours in a bank, with the night-watchman out of sight and a man with good intentions kneeling at the safe.

IT was fully six o'clock before Carl North finished his work at the bank that day; but, late as he was, there was another who was later. For, as he passed Billy Wargrave's desk, that young employee of the Hawfield National looked up at him with a tired and haggard eye.

Indeed, so care-worn did the youth appear that North was prompted to say:

"Look'ee here, Billy, you've got to ring off on this after-hours' work. It's beginning to show on you."

Billy's expression changed to something rather indefinable; then he replied:

"You know, Carl, I want to make good, so as not to run counter to your recommendation."

North had secured this very position for him—a situation only slightly less exalted than his own.

"Oh, that's all right enough, but there's such a thing as laying it on too thick," remonstrated North. "You're a youngster yet, and too close nose-rubbing over that desk don't help your general welfare."

Billy Wargrave summoned up a grin which, somehow or other, warmed Carl North by its very likeness to another smile which he had seen rest upon the features of another—Wanda Wargrave, Billy's sister.

Say what you will, men act from motive; and already we have discovered the reason for North's interest in Billy, his junior by some years.

"Well, Billy," said he as he caught up his hat, "coming?"

"I tell you, Carl," answered the other, "I'll promise to cut it short to-morrow, but to-day I've just got to finish this thing up."

He indicated the pile of bills and vouchers he was sorting.

"Well, this is the last time."

"All right," agreed Billy, perking up a kind of liveliness. "And, say, Carl—"

"Yes?" queried North, over his retreating shoulder.

"Coming over to the house this evening?" And there was the grin on Billy's face again—a grin which North answered with one of his own.

"Oh, I reckon I might drift over," he replied; "that is, if I won't run across your sister."

So Billy turned once more to his work, and was the very last man to leave the bank, with the exception of the burly old Irishman who acted as night-watchman. This individual North had run into at the door.

"Well, Donovan, you're prompt, as usual," he greeted cheerily.

"That I am, sor; and it's the old woman that drives me to it."

Such was the pleasantry of the two men who were destined, on their next meeting, to play far different rôles.

North had gone some two blocks on his homeward way when the care-worn, haggard look on Billy's face began to trouble him again. Surely the kid was putting too much heart into his job; for there *is* such a thing, especially with youngsters. Then, the more North thought out and analyzed the expression he remembered, the more he became puzzled by its frequent appearance.

A sudden thought whirled him right about. Here he had left the boy the final duty of locking up the safe; and as he reflected upon the fact that the institution was run rather unguardedly, owing to a long period of uneventful tranquillity, he decided to return to the bank.

It might be just possible that Billy, in his worn-out condition, would forget something—might even forget to lock the outer grille. He must look after his protégé; for was he not the brother of the girl who was with him in thought every minute of the day?

So he hot-footed it back, and just as

he turned into the entrance a glance up the street, in the opposite direction from which he had come, revealed Billy rounding a corner just two blocks off; but headed in a direction not leading to his home.

"Well," grunted North to himself, "the kid must have decided to take my advice on the spot, for there's mighty little work he could have done since I left. Anyway, though, I'll just run in a minute, to be satisfied that he left everything O.K. and shipshape."

So he entered with his key, passed into the grille, and stepped up to the safe. As a man will who seeks to be dead-sure of such a thing, even though he found the safe locked, he whirled the combination and opened it, purposing to close it himself immediately for his own self-satisfaction.

And just as he did so—just as the massive door swung ajar, and revealed to him, seemingly by the veriest chance, a pigeonhole whose emptiness sent him cold—the voice of Donovan, the night watchman, came from over his shoulder.

"Got one of them uneasy fits we all have, Mr. North?"

Quickly, for he realized the importance of it, North caught control of himself and answered easily:

"That's just it, Donovan. I just came back to twirl the old combination an extra circle or two—good for insomnia, you know."

Whereupon Donovan laughed good-humoredly, and North methodically locked the safe once more, keeping as good control upon himself as he could to guard the secret close. He reasoned, he could right the thing here at its very outset; that is, as soon as he caught up with Billy Wargrave, who had turned that corner only the moment before.

And his motive was not for himself alone, nor for Billy, either. The sum missing was not so very large, as sums go—being about one thousand dollars in tattered bills that were to have been redeemed. But he knew the high sense of honor of this sister whose smile so controlled him.

He must catch up to Billy and get that money!

But he didn't start to run till he was well outside the door and away from the eagle eye of Donovan. A half-block covered at a moderate gait, though, and he broke into a sprint, rounding the corner only in time to see Billy, now nearly a quarter-mile ahead, lose himself in the greater press of a far more crowded part of the town.

And Billy's disappearance was as complete as it was sudden; for, after a fifteen-minute search, North had to give it up and turn to another expedient.

He reasoned that Billy might have taken a roundabout way home. And, rest assured, Carl North knew where that house was.

He entered the front gate in time to stop the girl's retreat from the garden alongside.

"Oh, Ca— Mr. North, I look a perfect sight in this old apron!"

Such was Wanda's excuse for flight. But North didn't tell her how becoming the apron was. Instead, he asked as collectedly as he could:

"Has your brother got home yet?"

"Why, no; didn't he leave with you?"

"No; he had a little extra work to attend to, he said. Oh, well, it's of no consequence; I may meet him on my way back."

Good actor that he was, North could not feign absolute naturalness; for there was some uneasiness in her voice as she called after him:

"Nothing wrong, is there, Carl?"

Her slip in the matter of his name glowed him back into his old self. He knew he could right this thing without her getting even an inkling. He must.

"Not a thing!" he lied cheerily as he walked off.

II.

It was from behind one of the massive oaks that lined the sidewalk near the Wargrave home that he stepped up to Billy not ten minutes thereafter. Billy was hastening to a late supper, as he thought.

"Billy," said North calmly, "if you'll turn over those bills to me now, I can put them back where they belong before banking hours to-morrow morning; and, in that way, no one but you and I will ever know anything of the little mistake you made."

It was quietly put, and exceedingly

moderate, under the circumstances; but there was an undertone demanding positive obedience that struck its full note upon the younger man.

Billy, really good enough kind of a boy as he was at heart, broke down immediately. There was little bravado about him; which those who know would argue a good sign.

There was no denial of the theft; no subterfuge.

"But, Carl," he blurted out, hanging his head, "I haven't got them now. I will have them in time for banking hours to-morrow, though."

"Haven't got them?" cried North in dismay. "Who has, then? I've heard all about such 'returns in the morning.' They're the sure signs of the first offender. Come, Billy, open out with it all. You know I'm your friend, don't you?"

"I think you are," answered the youth in a low voice. "Here's how it was, Carl. I met the fellow day before yesterday. He's way up in G with certain financial concerns doing some sort of margin brokerage or other in New York. He seemed to cotton to me, and he let out yesterday that if I could get hold of a paltry thousand for just one night, he could make it five for me by morning."

"And you fell for as easy a steer as that?"

"Why not? He's got oodles of money himself; is living at the swellest suite in the Hamilton, and he's just doing me a good turn, that's all. Of course, it wasn't right for me to borrow the money without asking for it; but, look here, Carl, it would only be lying up there in the safe to-night; whereas I can use it to make four thousand, and still get it to the very same pigeonhole by morning. Anyway—"

"Here, here," snapped out North, for so warped a view-point was an old yarn to him, "there's no time to lose. What name is he under on the register of the Hamilton, this 'friend' of yours? When did you leave him?"

"His name is Crawley, and I've just this minute left him; he had ordered his supper sent up to his rooms."

"Good enough," commented North. Then he reached forward, took Billy firmly by both shoulders, and gazed at him fixedly, eye to eye.

"Billy Wargrave," said he coldly, "I'm going to do something for you—something that may involve me in more than you probably imagine at this moment, and I want you to promise me one thing. Will you do it?"

Billy caught the seriousness of the other.

"Yes, I will," he replied.

"Not one word of this to a soul. I mean this positively; mean it for as long as you live. Even if some time you might think it more generous to speak. Have I your promise?"

"Yes," said Billy firmly.

"I believe you," answered North, and, without another word, he hastened toward the center of the town.

III.

"COME in," sang out the husky voice of Tom Crawley, the "financier," as he looked up from his meal.

Carl North flashed open the door, stepped into the room, shut the door behind him quickly, and stood with his back to it.

Crawley let fall his knife and fork, and started to reach behind him.

"Keep right on with your eating, my friend," urged North in mock solicitousness, "for sometimes I am apt to be a trifle hasty; and, besides, we can talk well enough as matters stand."

"Who in the deuce are you, and what do you want?"

"Both questions easily answered," replied North. "It seems that you have benevolently taken charge of certain money from a young friend of mine. He has just delegated me to tell you that, after thinking it over, he fears it may humble him somewhat to be forever indebted to you for so much trouble."

"Here, cut it out!" growled Crawley. "Just what's the lay, young feller?"

"The exact lay is for you to 'lay' one thousand dollars in tattered United States bills right there before you on the table. And, mind you, no reaching below your waist!"

Crawley had lived long enough in crookdom to know when to obey; for it

needed no clairvoyant to guess the outline of the stocky bulldog revolver that was straining the side coat-pocket of his strong-visaged young visitor.

So into his breast-pocket he reached, and out came the money with which he had not yet had time to make off. For once the calm, easy, deliberate "getaway" of Tom Crawley, that made him famous in his underworld, was frustrated.

Still keeping the seated man covered, North swept the money to his own pocket, whirled suddenly, flung open the door once more, slammed it behind him, and clattered down to the hotel office.

"Well," he chuckled to himself, "maybe Napoleon could have done that better, but I doubt it. And now, Billy, boy, I guess you and I can really, for once, actually 'put it back the next morning.'"

It is not well to crow till you are out of the woods.

North's song of glee received a sudden check before he even quitted the hotel; for, at the very instant he was passing through the door, he collided with a portly, dignified gentleman whom he instantly recognized.

It was J. C. Hapworth, the bank-examiner. North knew him well by sight, though the recognition was not reciprocal.

And this meant? Instantly North figured out what would happen the next morning. Old Hapworth was famous for his "little surprises."

Like as not, he would be at the bank before any of the employees themselves. It was a way he had. Furthermore, North reasoned that if he himself should try to reach the bank before the examiner, that in itself would arouse the old sleuth's suspicion.

"Well, there's only one thing left," was his final conclusion. "I've got to get this money into the safe to-night."

By this time twilight had fallen into night; and, although he had not yet eaten, North judged that he would enjoy his meal far better after he had cleared this thing up; for, little though the thing seemed, it would be a rather tidy piece of work to enter the bank at this hour, replace the money, and get away without old Donovan being the wiser.

He did know, though, the rounds the burly Irishman was accustomed to make; and, being favored beyond the usual run of bank-breakers with a key that fitted the door, he counted upon being able to effect his purpose during the interval when Donovan made his hourly round to the safe-deposit vaults that lay behind the bank's safe, the one he must open.

So he waited the time he thought necessary just outside the bank building till Donovan would be at the rear. Then he quickly and as noiselessly as he could fitted the key and entered.

This affair must be managed without hitch, for any inkling of it would tarnish the new career of Billy, Wanda's brother. It was not sufficient that the money was returned. It must never be known by any one but himself and Billy that it had ever been taken.

He knew the girl well enough to know how much to heart she would take it, even if Billy were not made to suffer for his first deviation from strict honesty.

Accordingly, North was doubly cautious as he whirled the combination and swung open the safe-door.

He had even reached out the money; had almost completed the thing, when he heard the hurrying and heavy footfalls of Donovan as they clicked against the marble floor.

There could be no mistaking the alarm in that step. North knew he must decide upon his course quickly.

Always through his mind flashed the thought that Billy must not be implicated. Equally important must it be that he himself should not be discovered.

Although, at first blush, it might appear that the course which flashed into his head was a foolish one, still there was little time given him to concoct a better. Besides, it certainly had elements of originality, but it was very risky.

The plan, in short, was this: He would not replace the money at all. Instead, he would play burglar, counting on the few seconds by way of head-start he had of the watchman.

Once on the street, he could keep his face averted from his pursuer, whom he knew he could outdistance; and thus recognition, the most fatal thing that could befall him, would be avoided. And more, the plan ripened as he flashed it across his brain-cells.

During the pursuit he could drop the money to the ground; Donovan would pick it up, and the very thing he himself had come there to accomplish would take place—the money would get back to the safe—and with this advantage, that its disappearance would be attributed to this unknown burglar.

So North dashed from the doorway of the bank into the gloom of the street, with Donovan lumbering after him.

North thought it would be well to sprint for, say, the distance of a block, before he dropped the money, as, it would seem, to throw off the pursuit. And he did really drop the money there, but not exactly as he had intended; for, in the darkness that enshrouded the base of a large tree at this point, he caught his toe full against a protruding root, and down both he and money went to the ground.

So that, before he could rise, Donovan was upon him. And then happened the worst thing he had to fear, for the watchman fairly yelled his surprise:

"Mr. Carl North!"

But, leaving the money there beside the watchman, North availed himself of this very amazement to scramble to his feet, trip the astonished Irishman to the very position he had himself risen from, and so he made off into the night.

Not ten minutes thereafter Billy Wargrave, sitting, pondering, in his Morris chair in his own room, heard a pebble hit the pane alongside him. He rose and looked out, finally descrying the outline of North in the yard below.

With a feverish excitement, he tiptoed his way down-stairs and joined him under the shelter of some bushes that flanked the garden.

And there it was that North told him hastily what had happened.

"But, Carl," sang out Billy, "I won't let you get the name and odium of this thing. I simply won't do it."

"Oh, yes, you will, and it was just for that reason that I came to you to remind you of your promise. Don't you ever tell your sister."

"But, Carl, you will lose her, anyway, this way."

"No more than I would the other. She would never get over thinking you, her brother, had stolen it. As it turns out that Donovan recognized me, why, I am implicated, anyway; so there is no need to bring you into it at all. And, besides, Billy, you know you gave me your word, didn't you?"

"Yes," admitted Billy slowly.

"Well, then, just you charge this up to experience, an experience that another man is paying for you. But remember, Billy, I'm not doing this for you—it's for her."

"God, you do love her, Carl!"

"I do," answered the man who was now, by his own choice, a fugitive.

And so it was that Carl North disappeared from the town.

IV.

Late one afternoon in early summer a horseman topped the rise of a small hill near the western border of Yellowstone Park. This point of vantage gained, he checked his mount and looked about him.

But his gaze was not that of one who feared to be seen himself. Indeed, it bore rather a note of authority.

There is something connected with being in the United States service, be it in ever so minor a capacity, that brings with it a certain assurance, a confidence, a dignity. And it was with a blend of these that this man looked over the woodland stretching before him in undulating waves of hill and divide.

For the man was a ranger in the forestry service, and he was vested with certain authority in the control of these very trees that grew around him.

Every noticeable feature about the man spoke of one who lived continually in the open, but a more exacting view of his hands would have revealed that such a life had not always been his. If you would learn things of a man by mere observation, pay closest attention to his hands. They are the hardest part of him to disguise.

But nobody heretofore, in the three years that he had been out in this country, had been of keen enough deduction to question what he had represented himself to be upon his arrival. Indeed, the few natives with whom he had made acquaintance voted him a splendid chap,

as indeed he certainly was; and as for the lumbermen, the natural foes of the "ranger," they agreed in styling him the whitest government man in the service.

Not one of them would have given the slightest belief to a suspicion that the name he went by among them was not his own. But the truth is that the man who looked out over that prospect from the hilltop was Carl North, though he called himself something else.

And as he noted the first dimming of the falling day a certain sadness came over him, a sadness that, for the most part, he could hold in check, but a sadness which nevertheless had deepened the furrows in his face, and made it age ten years in three.

But he was essentially a sane man and, catching himself falling thus into moroseness, he whistled a snatch in lively fashion, while his eye caught the faint spiral of a bit of blue smoke that issued from a rather thick bit of timber which lay in the divide immediately below him.

"Hallo!" said he aloud to himself, as all lonely men have a habit of doing. "I wonder who that can be. That fire's right alongside the overland road. Guess I'll run down and look him over, anyway."

Whereupon he dug spur and made for the smoke. And, as he had surmised, he finally came up to the fire, and found it not fifty yards from the road which, at this point, was little more than a trail.

Two saddle-horses were tethered to trees, and one man was busy at the girth of one of the brutes. He looked up sharply at the hoof-fall of the ranger's mount. Then, adopting an easy familiarity, he sang out:

"Hallo, cul! Riding far?"

Now, there was an unfamiliarity in this very greeting that told North the fellow was not of these parts. But he was little enough interested in any one to have his curiosity very much aroused. So he contented himself with asking that threadbare question of the West:

"Prospecting?"

"Yep," answered the other, who was somewhat undersized, and of anything but pleasing cast of countenance.

"Where's your pardner?" went on North, indicating the other saddle-horse.

"Oh, he's just took a trot down there into the meadow to try to pot a 'chicken'."

"Um—um!" Then North started his brute again and sang back over his shoulder: "Be sure to douse that fire good when you're done with it. It's been dry for a month out here."

The tone of authority made the other jump to the right conclusion.

"Ranger?" he queried.

North answered in the affirmative, gave the fellow a "So long," and continued his way, by a short cut, to a sawmill at which he purposed to spend the lonesome night.

His interest in the "prospectors" had not even been sufficient to prompt him to await the return of the other man who had gone to "pot a chicken." But perhaps, if he had waited, there might have been an entirely different story from this to tell.

Indeed, it was not until he had got a full half mile on his way that it suddenly struck him that such an outfit as he had just quitted was anything but adapted to a prospecting expedition.

"They are certainly 'running light'," he mumbled to himself. "Why, there wasn't a sign of a pack animal, and not even a pick—nothing but the two mounts. Well, anyway, it's none of my business, I guess."

But, as he attained the summit of a somewhat higher ridge, and was about to trot down toward the sawmill, some two miles farther along, he descried something that made his interest quicken to a decided gallop.

For, just rounding a bend in the snake-like, overland road, he saw the weekly "express-stage," whose horses were running free, for the vehicle was behind time. And, even at this distance, North made out the dots of three occupants of the vehicle.

The stage was destined after two more turns to hit the "drop" that would take it immediately past the very spot where he had met the "prospector," which spot, he recalled with a flash, was heavily timbered and deep set in underbrush.

"A hold-up, by Heaven!" cried the ranger, as he dug away to the sawmill for help. "And the express box as the attraction."

But at the mill there was not one horse

available for the hands to accompany him to the rescue; so he had to content himself with the command:

"You fellers make it as quick as you can afoot; I'll hold 'em off till you can do it. Remember, it's just at the turn in Bender's Creek. Whoopee!"

And with this yell, by way of battle-cry, he surged ahead of the half-dozen mill hands who had snatched up weapons and were already started at a good clip in his wake.

Nothing could have been better timed than his arrival at the bend; for it was at the very second that the stage "leaders" had been brought to their haunches and the two "prospectors" were displaying a brace of six-shooters each.

North covered one of the hold-ups, and as his eye traveled to its target, he recognized this man.

"I've seen you before, Crawley!" he yelled.

But Crawley's gun spoke for him; not at North, however, but at a young man who sat beside a girl in the stage.

And, at this same instant, the stage-driver, by a deft drawing of his gun, downed the little fellow with whom North had previously spoken.

So that now it was two to one in favor of the stage, both North and the driver covering Crawley. And so they held this tableau until the mill hands came up.

It was with glee that one of them shouted, addressing North:

"That was sure O. K., Ranger Livingstone!"

And, without more ado, they slung what was destined to be the final rope over the neck of Crawley, the hold-up man.

But that scoundrel, hearing the name by which the mill hand had called North, saw some chance of revenge.

"Livingstone, eh? Not much. That lad ain't no other than Mr. Carl North, the escaped bank robber!"

At which assertion all stood dumfounded. Then came a further development from the direction of the stage-coach.

It was in the muffled voice of the wounded young man whom North had not yet got a good look at, nor yet the girl beside him.

"Hold on," he cried as strongly as he could, "you've got to free me from that promise, Carl. It won't make much difference now."

And thereupon Billy Wargrave explained about that thousand. The full facts he told them all; and, then to North's private ear, that ear which now was close to him, being directly alongside the face of Wanda:

"You see, Carl, Wanda's health failed after you left; and so, when father died, I brought her out here to see if she couldn't improve; and, I reckon," he continued as that old grin shaped itself on his twisting features, "I reckon I've found the right kind of medicine."

He even managed to place their hands together.

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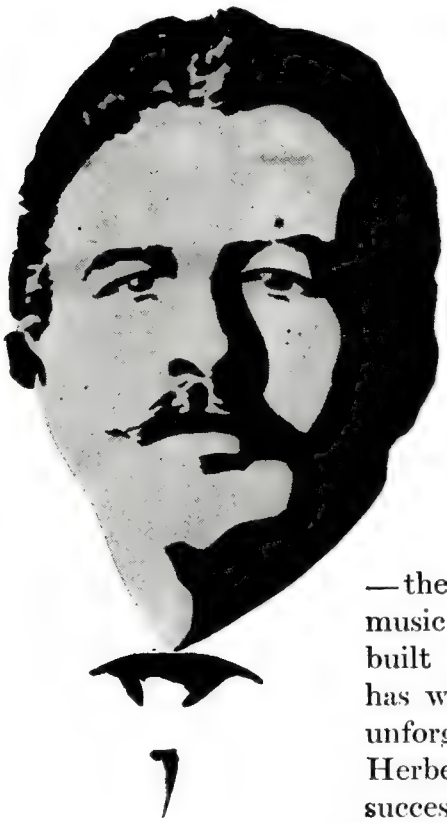

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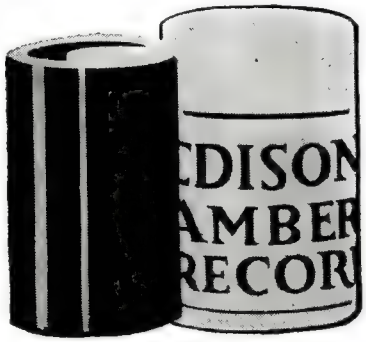

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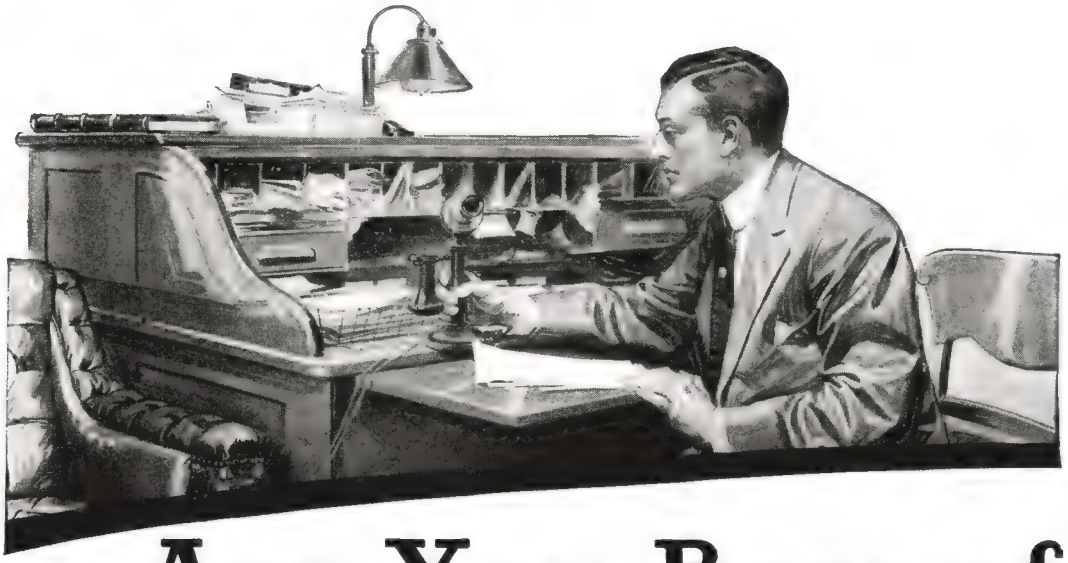

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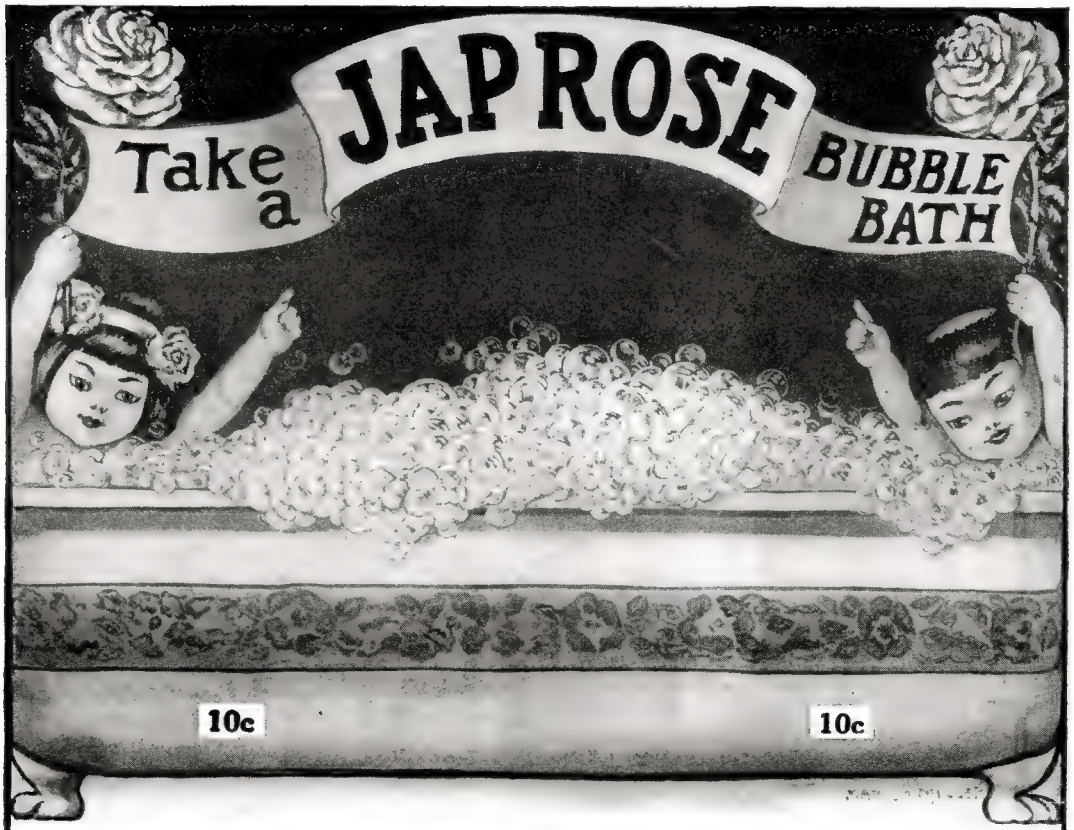

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in a space of two square feet for each bird. No green cut bone of any description is fed, and the food used is inexpensive as compared with food others are using.

Our new book, the PHILO SYSTEM OF POULTRY KEEPING, gives full particulars regarding these wonderful discoveries, with simple, easy-to-understand directions that are right to the point, and 15 pages of illustrations showing all branches of the work from start to finish.

DON'T LET THE CHICKS DIE IN THE SHELL.

One of our secrets of success is to save all the chickens that are fully developed at hatching time, whether they can crack the shell or not. It is a simple trick and believed to be the secret of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese which enabled them to sell the chicks at 10 cents a dozen.

CHICKEN FEED AT 15 CENTS A BUSHEL.

Our book tells how to make the best green food with but little trouble and have a good supply, any day in the year, winter or summer. It is just as impossible to get a large egg yield without green food as it is to keep a cow without hay or fodder.

OUR NEW BROODER SAVES 2 CENTS ON EACH CHICKEN.

No lamp required. No danger of chilling, overheating or burning up the chickens as with brooders using lamps or any kind of fire. They also keep all the lice off the chickens automatically or kill any that may be on them when placed in the brooder. Our book gives full plans and the right to make and use them. One can easily be made in an hour at a cost of 25 TO 50 CENTS.

TESTIMONIALS.

Bellefontaine, Ohio, June 7, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I just want to tell you of the success I have had with the Philo system. In January, 1909, I purchased one of your Philo System books and I commenced to hatch chickens. On the third day of February, 1909, I succeeded in hatching ten chicks. I put them in one of your fireless brooders and we had zero weather. We succeeded in bringing through nine; one got killed by accident. On June 1, one of the pullets laid her first egg, and the most remarkable thing is she has laid every day since up to the present time. Yours truly, R. S. LaRue.

205 S. Clinton St., Baltimore, Md., May 28, 1909.

E. R. Philo, Publisher, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have embarked in the poultry business on a small scale (Philo System) and am having the best of success so far, sixty-eight per cent of eggs hatched by hens, all chicks alive and healthy at this writing; they are now three weeks old. Mr. Philo is a public benefactor, and I don't believe his System can be improved upon, and so I am now looking for more yard room, having but 15x30 where I am now. Yours truly, C. H. Leach.

THREE POUND ROASTERS TEN WEEKS OLD

South Britain, Conn., April 14, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have followed your system as close as I could; the result is a complete success. If there can be any improvement on nature, your brooder is it. The first experience I had with your System was last December. I hatched 17 chicks under two hens, put them as soon as hatched in one of your brooders out of doors and at the age of three months I sold them at 35c a pound. They then averaged 2 1-2 lbs. each, and the man I sold them to said they were the finest he ever saw, and he wants all I can spare this season.

Yours truly A. E. Nelson.

Osakis, Minn., June 7, 1909.

Mr. E. R. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—You certainly have the greatest system the world has ever known. I have had experience with poultry, but I know you have the system that brings the real profits. Yours

Jesse Underwood.

Brockport, N. Y., Sept. 12, 1908.

Mr. E. W. Philo, Elmira, N. Y.

Dear Sir:—I have had perfect success brooding chickens your way. I think your method will raise stronger, healthier chicks than the old way of using lamps and besides it saves so much work and risk.

Yours respectfully,

M. S. Gooding.

Send $1.00 direct to the publisher and a copy of the latest revised edition of the book will be sent you by return mail.

E. R. PHILO, PUBLISHER, 280 THIRD ST., ELMIRA, N.Y.

The Birthday Party.

Nan is six years old. Mamma and Bobbie are giving her a party. And what a dinner Mamma has prepared! Just now she is serving a Jell-O course, and there is no mistaking the children's approval. They all like

JELL-O

because it is delicious and beautiful. It is so pure, wholesome and nutritious that it is better for them than any other kind of dessert.

A Jell-O dessert can be made in a minute. Simply add boiling water and let cool.

Seven delicious flavors: Strawberry, Lemon, Orange, Raspberry, Peach, Cherry and Chocolate.

All grocers sell Jell-O, 10 cents a package.

The beautiful new Jell-O Recipe Book, "DESSERTS OF THE WORLD," will be sent free to all who ask for it.

THE GENESEE PURE FOOD CO.,
Le Roy, N. Y., and Bridgeburg, Can.

We Have 1,500 Men in Turkey

—and our own buyers, on horseback, visit thousands of farms, skillfully testing the tobacco.

They pick out unerringly the leaves with the choicest aroma, then buy direct from the planter.

Thus we save merchants' profits, and get the very cream of the crop.

That is why no cigarettes in the world, with the Murad flavor, sell at the Murad price.

MURAD

CIGARETTES

10 for 15 cents

S. ANARGYROS, New York
A CORPORATION

You Can Furnish Your Home And Clothe Yourself Without Cost

BY LARKIN FACTORY-TO-FAMILY DEALING

You have to buy such household-supplies as **Coffee, Teas, Spices, Extracts, Laundry and Toilet Soaps,** etc., somewhere. The Larkin Products include over 300 of these necessities, all of the finest quality, for you to select from. When once you have bought them direct from us, the manufacturers, you will never trade anywhere else, for you can save one-half of what you are now spending at retail for similar articles.

You Get a Premium With Every Purchase

Without spending a cent extra, you can obtain as Premiums with your purchases, all kinds of desirable household furnishings and wearing-apparel; many articles, probably, which you would feel you could not afford in any other way. You will find Larkin Factory-to-Family dealing a practical and pleasant way of economizing.

Over 1500 Premiums To Choose From

The Furs and Dishes illustrated are but examples of our many offerings. Our Premiums include **Silverware, Clocks, Rugs, Carpets, Dishes, Furniture, Stoves,** etc.; also Fall and Winter styles in **Women's Furs, Made-to-Order Suits, Coats and other Wearing-Apparel**; all high-grade, dependable merchandise.

How We Give Double Retail Value

We sell our Products direct to you at prices that include but our single profit. We save and give to you, in extra value, with every purchase, all expenses, profits and losses of the wholesaler, sales-agent and retailer that you have to pay when you buy at a store. You can have this extra value either in a Premium or in additional Products, just as you prefer. **To illustrate, for $10.00 you can have $10.00 worth of Larkin Products and any $10.00 Premium in our Catalog; without the Premium, for $10.00, you can have $20.00 worth of Products. Either way, you get $20.00 worth of retail value for $10.00.**

No. 2605

No. 304

FRENCH CONEY SHAWL-SCARF No. 2605.
Given with $10.00 worth of Larkin Products.

FRENCH CONEY RUG MUFF No. 304
Offered, together with $10.00 worth of Larkin Products for $9.00.
See our Catalog.

30 Days' Free Trial—Pay If Pleased

We don't ask you to pay us a cent until you have tried our Products and have seen the Premium. We will ship you $10.00 worth of Larkin Products of your selection and any $10.00 Premium offered by us, on thirty days' trial. You then pay us $10.00, if satisfied; if not, we will remove the goods at our expense and charge you nothing for a reasonable amount of the products used in trial.

We are the largest manufacturers in the world selling direct to the consumer. We have been in business thirty-four years and have over two million satisfied customers.

Our Catalog Free

It is brimful of money-saving offers. It tells you all about Larkin Factory-to-Family Dealing; gives the entire list of over 300 Larkin Products; illustrates and describes accurately and clearly all of the 1500 Larkin Premiums. Send for a copy before you forget it.

69-PIECE BLUE WILLOW WARE DINNER-SET No. 805
Given with $10.00 worth of Larkin Products.
See our Catalog.

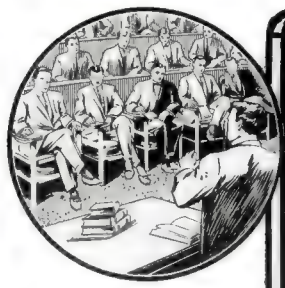
No. 805

Larkin Co.
Established, 1875
BUFFALO, N. Y.

Friends West of the Mississippi, save time by addressing
LARKIN CO.,
PEORIA ILL.

FILL IN—CUT HERE—MAIL TODAY
Larkin Co. Mail Catalog No. 129 and explain how I can furnish my home out of present cost of living.

Name
St. and No. or R. D.
P. O.
State
G. P. 129



No other Fountain Pen, at ANY price, has ALL these 12 features.

Few have even ONE of them:

1. Fills and cleans itself in 5 seconds.
2. Cannot leak, even when carried point downward.
3. Self-regulating ink flow. Writes just as fast or slow as you wish.
4. Instantaneous ink flow. Writes at the FIRST stroke.
5. Continuous ink flow. Never MISSES a stroke.
6. Exactly-even ink flow. Never blots, splatters nor floods.
7. 14K Gold Iridium-tipped points. Never catch or scratch and last for years.
8. Double ink feed—above as well as below the nib. (The secret of Features 3, 4 and 5.)
9. Barrel and cap made of finest quality polished black Vulcanite.
10. No dropper, clip or special ink necessary.
11. A point, a size and a price for every Hand, every Purpose and every Pocketbook.
12. Sold on an UNCONDITIONAL Guarantee of Satisfaction OR MONEY BACK.

Yet the Onoto COSTS YOU NO MORE than the old-fashioned finger-besmearing leaky Dropper-Fillers or the new-fangled impractical Rubber-Sack and Pump-filling kinds!

Get pen-wise and get your Money's Worth.

WHY is it that so few *women* own and use Fountain Pens? Stop and think! Doesn't it mean just as much to *you* as to the Men Folk to have *your* pen and ink always handy—always ready to use—and so exactly suited to your individual hand that you *must* always write well—a pen that makes writing real Fun, not a disagreeable Duty?

Think of the convenience this means!

Think of the time you save!

Think of the mental and physical strain you save!

Think of how much better you can express yourself, and how much better your hand-writing *looks!*

And think of the *money* you save in the course of a year, by eliminating the continual expense for new pen-holders—new points—for dried-up ink you never use—and, perhaps, for the table covers, dresses and carpets you spoil when the baby, or you yourself, knock the bottle over! This last saving *alone* may be enough to buy ONOTO Pens for the whole family several times over.

FREE—Onoto Score Pads for "Bridge" or "Five Hundred"

We have prepared an especially practical score pad for "Bridge" or "Five Hundred." If you will send us the name and address of your favorite Stationery Dealer, (state whether Stationery, Drug or Dept. store) we will send you one of these Score Pads postpaid.

Read this Letter—a Typical Onoto Testimonial.

"Your ONOTO Pen has proven entirely satisfactory. It has proved all you claim for it. The nib suits me to a dot. It has never leaked, no matter in what position it was left or carried. It is really a non-leakable pen. My fingers are no longer ink-smeared where the pen crosses them, as they used to be with other makes of pens. My ONOTO writes evenly until the last drop of ink is out and does not "slobber" when nearly empty as most other pens do. The flow of ink from the pen, freely or scantily, is entirely under my control. The self-filling device works nicely. The filling of the pen is a matter of seconds, and as there is no rubber bag to get out of order, the self-filling device is as lasting and permanent as it can be made.

Lastly, both the pen and reservoir can be cleaned in a few moments by using the self-filling device as a pump or syringe in a little clean water."
(Signed) J. B. KNOEPFLER.

Iowa State Teachers College,
Cedar Falls, Iowa,
July 24th, 1909.

All we ask is that you see and try an ONOTO.

And this is all we *need* to ask.

Because Seeing means Trying, Trying means Buying, and Buying means Guaranteed Satisfaction.

Sold everywhere by leading Stationery, Department and Drug Stores. Four Sizes—$2.50, $3, $4 and $5. 15 different style points in each size. If no nearby local dealer is willing to supply *you*, write for Catalog N, a free ONOTO Score Book and the name of the *nearest* ONOTO dealer—or order direct.

ONOTO PEN COMPANY
261 Broadway New York

ONOTO

Trademark Registered.

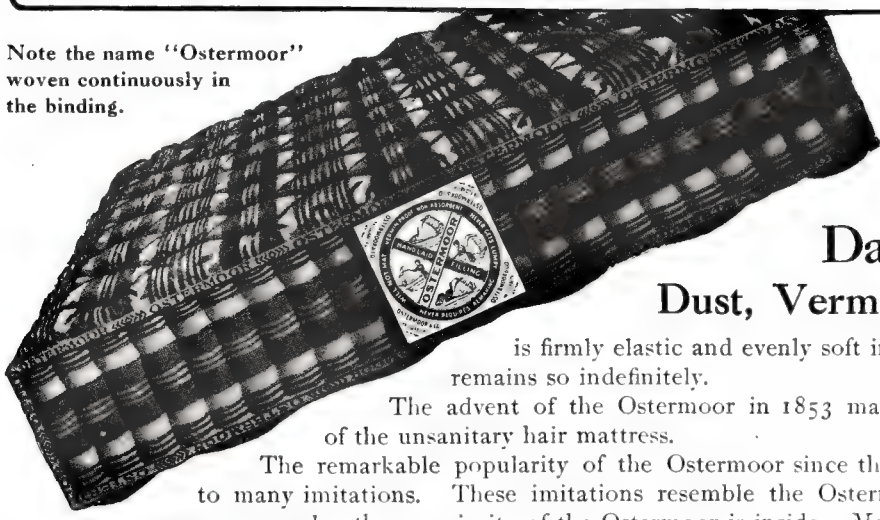
Fifty years ago the Ostermoor Trade-mark was sewed on mattresses that have been in use ever since and are as comfortable to-day as when bought.

Do not believe any mattress to be a genuine Ostermoor until you find sewn on the end the trade-mark label bearing this figure.

"The Mattress that is Built—Not Stuffed"

Ostermoor $15.

Note the name "Ostermoor" woven continuously in the binding.



This Mattress is Positively

Proof Against Dampness, Dust, Vermin, Germs

is firmly elastic and evenly soft in every spot, and remains so indefinitely.

The advent of the Ostermoor in 1853 marked the passing of the unsanitary hair mattress.

The remarkable popularity of the Ostermoor since then has given rise to many imitations. These imitations resemble the Ostermoor in outward appearance only; the superiority of the Ostermoor is inside. Many people testify that their Ostermoors, in use from twenty-five to fifty-two years, are to-day as good as new.

Buy what you wish, but don't believe any mattress to be Ostermoor which does not bear the Ostermoor trade-mark, and do not judge the Ostermoor by the mattress you are told is just as good.

Our 144-Page Book With Samples of Ticking Sent Free

The Ostermoor Mattress is not for sale at stores generally, but there's an Ostermoor dealer in most places—the livest merchant in town. Write us and we'll give you his name. But don't take chances with imitations at other stores—make sure you're getting the genuine Ostermoor—our trade-mark label is your guarantee. We will ship you a mattress by express, prepaid, same day your check is received by us, when we have no dealer or he has none in stock. Sleep on an Ostermoor Mattress for a month—then, if for any reason you're dissatisfied, we'll return every penny of your money.

MATTRESSES COST		
4 ft. 6 in.,	45 lbs.	$15.00
4 ft.	40 lbs.	13.35
3 ft. 6 in.,	35 lbs.	11.70
3 ft.	30 lbs.	10.00
2 ft. 6 in.,	25 lbs.	8.35

All 6 ft. 3 in. long

EXPRESS CHARGES PREPAID
In two parts, 50 cents extra

OSTERMOOR & CO., 110 Elizabeth Street, New York

Canadian Agency: Alaska Feather & Down Co., Ltd., Montreal

OWN YOUR OWN CIGAR STORE

Patented Dec. 22, '08.
Other Patents Pending.

Fifty SARGENT Perfectos or Panetelas
Regular Price, $3.50

One SARGENT Patent Cigar Chest
Regular Price, $3.50

$3.50 for BOTH

THE CHEST. Invented less than a year ago, over 40,000 of our Patent Cigar Chests have been sold to date. Not one cigar dealer in a thousand keeps his cigars as fresh as you can keep yours—if you own one. This Chest supplies moisture to the cigars and preserves their flavor by an entirely new patent process. Each cigar to the very last one is kept in perfect condition. To introduce our cigars to you — to prove that it will pay you well to buy by the box—we will give you with your first order one of these chests. The chest is oak, Mission Finish, glass lined, heavily insulated, and holds 100 cigars. No sponges or pads to bother with.

THE CIGARS. The strongest statement we can make in cold type about the fine quality and flavor of our cigars is this: If they were not good enough to bring us re-orders, on their own merits, we would lose out. By shipping direct from factory to you, cutting out jobbers' and retailers' profits, we are selling at 7c a cigar you will find it hard to equal at 15c. Sargent Cigars are made of blended domestic tobaccos of the finest selection, with a flavoring of choice Havana. They appeal to smokers, not only because of their aroma, but because they can be smoked freely without harmful results. No headaches or nervousness. We are still waiting to hear the first complaint.

OUR PROPOSITION. Send us $3.50 and we will send you 50 Sargent Perfectos or Panetelas and the Cigar Chest. If you order 100 cigars and Chest, price $7.00, we will prepay express East of the Mississippi River. West of the Mississippi add $1.00. If you prefer Mahogany Chest send $2 extra; if Circassian Walnut $3 extra. State preference for mild, medium or strong cigars. Subsequent re-orders of cigars filled at $3.50 for 50, $7 for 100.

GUARANTEE. If Chest or Cigars are not up to your expectations, send them back at our expense and we will return your money at once.

REFERENCES. If you want to know who we are, ask the first Bridgeport National, Pequonnock National or City National Bank of Bridgeport.

SARGENT CIGAR CO., 642 WATER ST., BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

We Make Cigar Chests in Several Handsome Woods. Sizes for 100, 500 and 1000 Cigars. Send for Catalog.

Fifteen Kinds of Work With One Set of Tools, $3.50

One pair Handles, Many different Heads at a price ⅓ that of Separate Tools. You wouldn't buy separate Bit Stalk for each bit; why pay for separate handles for Pincers, End Cutting Pliers, Harness Belt and Leather Punch, Pruning Shears, Tin Snips, Pliers, Wire Cutters, Adjustable Alligator Wrench, Pipe Tongs, Nut Cracks, Screwdrivers, Tack Pullers, Nail Pullers, Calipers and Dividers? Heads of tool steel, drop forge, ground, tempered and polished. Steel handles carefully shaped and finished. Soon pay for themselves by doing work that other tools cannot do. Not a combination tool, but known to thousands of mechanics, tradesmen, householders, farmers as **KOETH'S KOMBINATION KIT.** If your dealer does not handle, we will send prepaid for $3.50. Our guarantee and money back plan eliminates all risk. Write today for illustrated folder and free particulars. Dealers and agents write for interesting proposition.

CURRIER-KOETH MFG. CO., Dept. 20, Coudersport, Pa.

One Blade Shaved

MR. HIRAM PERCY MAXIM

Mr. Maxim 151 Times

Inventor of the famous Maxim Silencer, etc., and eminent mechanical engineer, says: "I have shaved with one AutoStrop blade 151 consecutive shaves, and consider that the AutoStrop is the only safety razor which is mechanically perfect and practical."

More about prominent and enthusiastic AutoStroppers in our next advertisements.

A BLADE A YEAR—Though 151 consecutive shaves sounds unusual, there isn't anything particularly wonderful about it. Any fine razor blade, stropped expertly each shave, will shave you for six months or a year, because you constantly *renew* the edge. An AutoStrop blade is long-lived because you constantly renew the edge by automatic stropping. And as for the twelve blades in the AutoStrop set, they will probably last you several years instead of one.

AutoStrop SAFETY RAZOR Strops Itself

THE WHOLE AUTO STROP IDEA—Your friends who shave themselves with old-fashioned razors don't have their razors honed more than once or twice per year. The AutoStrop Safety Razor is simply the same edge that your old-fashioned friend or head barber uses, only it is constructed ingeniously so that a novice can strop it as expertly as the head barber, and so that a novice can shave with it as expertly as the head barber, and can't cut himself. That is all you want a razor to do, is it not?

TO GET HEAD BARBER SHAVES—you must strop your blades. No other way to get them. That is why the AutoStrop is a strop razor.

You simply slip strop through the AutoStrop Razor (without removing blade or taking apart,) and move back and forth. Blade falls automatically on strop at *exactly* the right angle and right pressure, thus stropping itself expertly. No experience required. No trouble. No time lost. Result? Delicious edge quick! Cost per shave, ¼ to ½ cent; time, 4 to 5 minutes.

No blade trouble. Little blade expense. A wipe and it's clean and dry. Nothing to unscrew and screw up again.

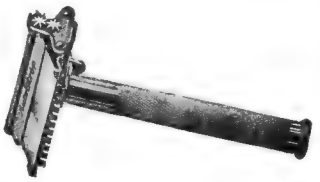
Consists of heavily silver-plated holder, 12 blades and strop, in small, handsome leather case, size only 2x4 in. Price $5.00, which is probably the total cost of your shaving for years.

Get one and try it. You'll be glad you did. Like Mr. Maxim you'll say it's the only *practical* safety razor.

GET ONE AND TRY IT FREE.—for thirty days. If you don't like it, get your $5.00 refunded. If your retailer doesn't sell the AutoStrop on thirty days' free trial, we will. Every buyer must be satisfied with his AutoStrop or with his money back. Get an Auto Strop while you have it in mind.

A BOOK YOU WANT.—If your shaving is too satisfactory, you don't want it, but if it isn't, this book will keep you up late. It's a quick, speedy, witty, instructive, interesting conversation, entitled: "An Interview With the Greatest Razor Expert." Write us before you forget.

AUTOSTROP SAFETY RAZOR COMPANY
344 Fifth Ave., NEW YORK
14 St. Helen Street, Montreal
61 New Oxford St., London



Blame the Strop!

How about the strop behind **your** razor?
How about your ability to use it?
Is **every** shave a pleasure **now?**

The Never Fail Sharpens any razor—does it better and in less time than a hand expert can, and gives the keenest, smoothest cutting edge you ever saw.

A western bank president (name on application) writes: "Have used one.....blade over six weeks, and I shave daily. One box of blades with your stropper should last a life time. Wouldn't part with mine for $50."

Will You Try It for Thirty Days?

Money back if you want it—ask any bank in this city as to our responsibility

Put on the market only four months ago, after years of experimenting, thousands of **Never Fail Stroppers** sent out on trial have triumphantly proved their worth in every State in the Union. The combination of a perfect strop with an infallible, automatic action is a real necessity for every man who shaves—or should shave. Every consideration of economy and personal comfort urges you to supply yourself today.

Every user of safety razors knows that mighty few—if any—of his blades are actually fit to use until they are stropped. The **Never Fail** will make every one of them good for from 50 to 150 perfect shaves, so it pays for itself in money as well as time saved.

No. 1 For Every Style of Safety

Be sure to state in the coupon the number of stropper you want.

Order by number, with the coupon below. No. 1 for every style of safety, weighs 6 ozs. No. 2 for the old style razor, weighs 8 ozs.

No. 2 For the Old Style Razor

THE NEVER FAIL CO.
1053 Nicholas Bldg.
TOLEDO, O.

The Never Fail Co.
1053 Nicholas Bldg.
TOLEDO, O.

Enclosed find $3 for one No..... NEVER FAIL STROPPER, on 30 days' trial. If not satisfactory in every way, I am to have my money back upon return of stropper.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

PRICE $1.50 AND UP

STAR SAFETY RAZOR

The STAR SAFETY RAZOR is the only one that gives entire satisfaction. The fact that it has a FORGED BLADE like the old style razor which can be STROPPED AUTOMATICALLY and will LAST INDEFINITELY, proves that there is no need of continually buying blades and guarantees the Star to be the BEST and most INEXPENSIVE razor on the market that gives universal satisfaction. Five million users in the past thirty years are positive proof of this statement.

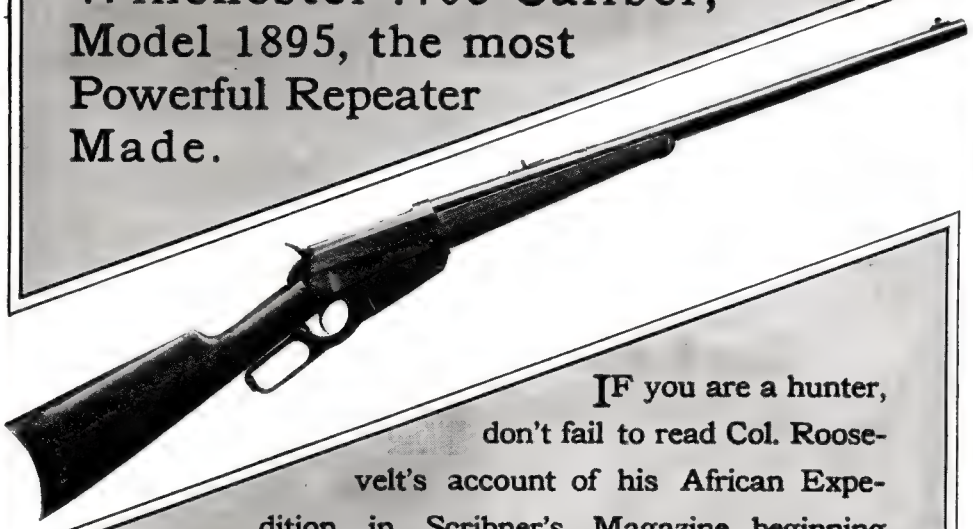
No ROUGH EDGES to IRRITATE the FACE; the blade is guaranteed to shave the HEAVIEST BEARD without causing irritation or discomfort. A quick, comfortable and enjoyable shave is assured the user.

Catalogue on request. KAMPFE BROTHERS, 7 Reade St., New York City.

WINCHESTER

THE RIFLE THAT'S MAKING HUNTING HISTORY IN AFRICA.

Winchester .405 Caliber, Model 1895, the most Powerful Repeater Made.



IF you are a hunter, don't fail to read Col. Roosevelt's account of his African Expedition in Scribner's Magazine, beginning with the October number. Then, if you want a rifle such as experience-taught big game hunters use, you'll surely buy a Winchester. Winchester Rifles are made for all kinds of hunting and Winchester Ammunition is made for all kinds of guns.

Sold by Dealers Everywhere.

INSIST UPON HAVING THE RED W BRAND.

2c a Week Pays Wash Bill!

Write for FREE Book

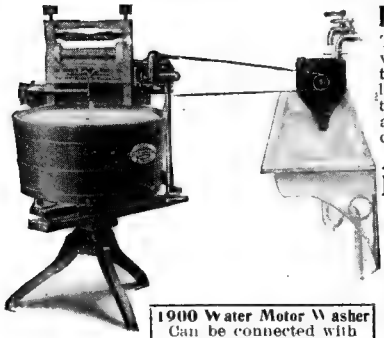
Electricity or Water-Power Does the Work

Just a "Twist of the Wrist" Starts or Stops the Machine!

The 1900 Motor Washers are now at work in thousands of homes. They are doing the work formerly done by women, **at a cost of 2 cents a week for power!** Saving thousands upon thousands of dollars in wash bills. Saving worlds of wash-day troubles. Leaving the women free to do other work while the machines are doing the washing.

The 1900 Motor Washer

Washes a Tubful in Six Minutes!



1900 Water Motor Washer
Can be connected with any water tap instantly

Handles heavy blankets or dainty laces.

The outfit consists of the famous 1900 Washer with either Electric Motor or Water Motor. You turn on the power as easily as you turn on the light, and back and forth goes the tub, washing the clothes for dear life. And it's all so simple and easy that overseeing its work is mere child's play.

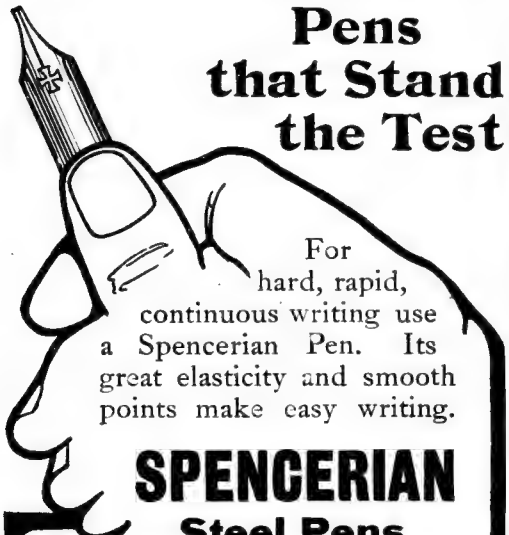
1900 Electric Motor Washer
Can be connected with any ordinary Electric Light Fixture

A Self-Working Wringer Free With Every Washer

The motor runs Washer and Wringer. We guarantee the perfect working of both. No extra charge for Wringer, which is one of the finest made. **Write for FREE BOOK and 30 Days' FREE TRIAL OFFER!** Don't doubt! Don't say it can't be done. The free book **proves** that it **can.** But we do not ask you to take our word for it. We offer to send a 1900 Motor Washer on absolute **Free Trial** for an entire **month** to any responsible person. Not a cent of **security**—nor a promise to **buy.** Just your word that you will give it a test. We even agree to **pay the freight,** and will take it back if it fails to do all we claim for it. A postal card with your name and address sent to us **today** will bring you the book free by **return mail.**

All correspondence should be addressed to **1900 WASHER CO., 3365 Henry St., Binghamton, N. Y.** Or, if you live in Canada, write to the Canadian Washer Co., 355 Yonge St., Toronto, Canada.

BRANCH HOUSES: We maintain branches at 1947 Broadway, New York City, and 1113 Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn, and in all principal cities. We also make shipments from our warehouses in Kansas City, San Francisco and Seattle.



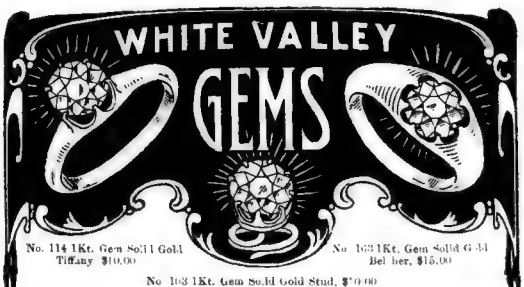
Pens that Stand the Test

For hard, rapid, continuous writing use a Spencerian Pen. Its great elasticity and smooth points make easy writing.

SPENCERIAN Steel Pens

outlive others because of the fine workmanship and the high quality *Spencerian Pen Steel* from which they are made. Sample card of 12—all different—sent for 6c postage.

SPENCERIAN PEN CO., 349 BROADWAY, N. Y.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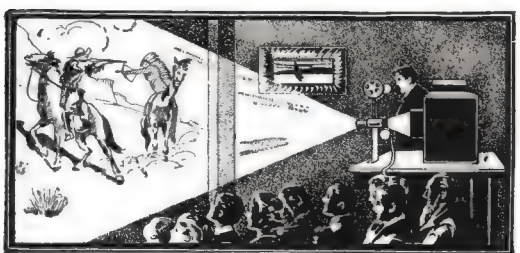

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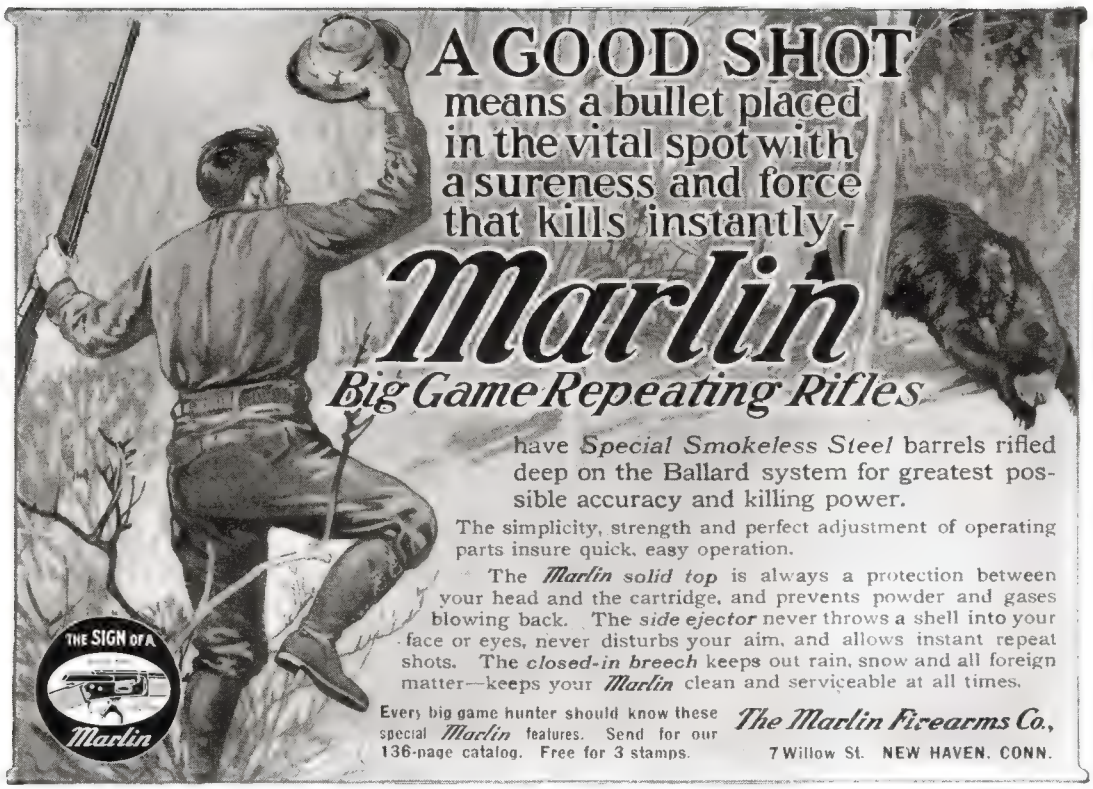

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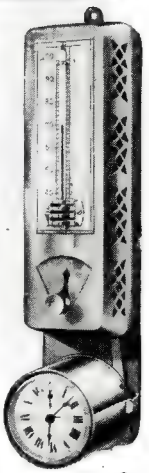

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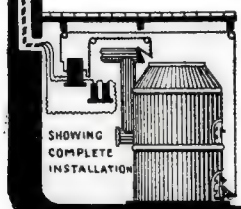

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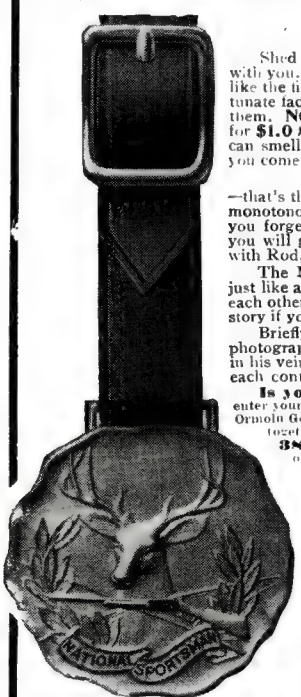

Shed your pack, fill your pipe, and sit down—we want to have a little straight "Head Camp" fire talk with you. To get it, hit down to "brass tacks," you've got your share of red corpuscles in your blood—you like the fields, and woods and waters—you like the solo of the reel, and the voice of the gun. It's an unfortunate fact that you, who love these things, cannot get more than from one to four weeks off in a year to enjoy them. **NOW LISTEN:**—If we can show you how you can take a fishing or hunting trip twelve times a year for **$1.00** without neglecting your work, will you take it? If we can take you into the big woods where you can smell the evergreens, and hear the babble of the brook, and see at close range big game and small, will you come with us? Subscribe for the

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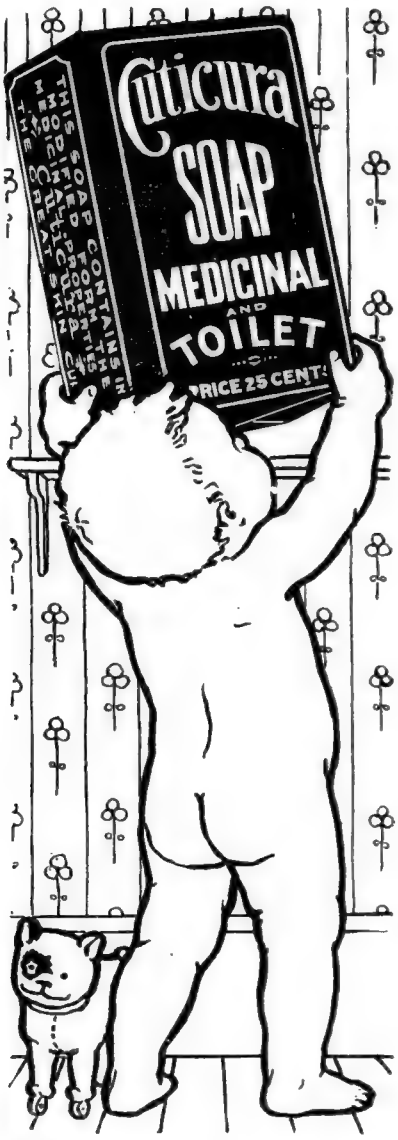

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See the magnificent display of rings, diamonds, brooches, necklaces, ear rings, bracelets, lockets, pin sets, emblems, charms, bags, belt buckles, fobs, pendants and innumerable other articles in jewelry. Examine at your leisure this great storehouse of golden treasures gathered from all the world! Every article is perfectly pictured and accurately described, down to the minutest detail. And, best of all, the price of each means an actual saving to the purchaser of from **one-third** to **one-half!**

No. G6516. Gold filled locket, beautiful flower design, rose gold finish. Center of flower is set with a fine white stone.

No. G7733. Handsome cuff pin set, solid gold, perfectly plain pattern, Roman yellow finish.

Quality of Jewelry GUARANTEED by Millions of Capital

We have samples of the Jewelry we sell **tested by the United States Government Assay Office** for the amount of pure virgin gold it contains. Our guarantee of quality, with millions of dollars behind it, gives you **absolute protection.** If goods are not up to the standard claimed, **back comes your money!**

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We extend credit freely for amounts of $5 and upwards. No notes, no security, no interest. Just a plain open account—absolutely confidential. We allow no discount for cash, as our prices are cut to the limit.

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You can order goods without risk, as we gladly allow 30 days to examine, compare and wear the jewelry before you decide about keeping it. We even pay the express or mailing charges. Thus it becomes a pleasure to buy on our liberal Credit Plan.

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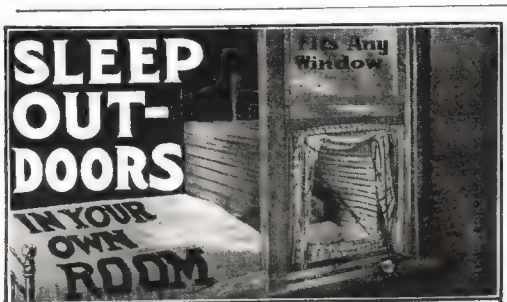
No. G2223. Clear white, perfectly cut, genuine diamond, set in heavy, solid gold mounting.

(10)

LINCOLN WATCH & JEWELRY CO., 3453 Mosprat St., Chicago



We want to show **you** how practical it is to receive all the benefits of out-of-door sleeping—with the face, only, coming in contact with the crisp, out-door air—enjoying the comforts of a warm room, protected from drafts, storms, colds and insects—by using a

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Has an awning to protect sleeper—no nails or screws to mar the woodwork—can be instantly adjusted to any window. Write for free booklet, "What Fresh Air Will Do," and full particulars of our **30-day free trial offer.**

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is not a revolver for *you* to make temporarily safe by throwing on or off some button or lever, but a revolver that *we* have made *permanently* and *automatically* safe by the patented exclusive Iver Johnson construction.

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See the fortunes made with **Strange Invention.** Of this sum **Korstad** (Farmer) made **$2,212.13 in 2 weeks; Zimmerman** (Farmer) **$3,856 in 39 days; Stoneman** (Artist) **$2,481.68 in 60 days.** No wonder, Cashman says:—"A man who can't sell your goods, couldn't sell bread in a famine." But listen! **Rasp** (Agent) made **$1,685 in 73 days; Juell** (Clerk) **$6,800; Oviatt** (Minister) **$4,000; Cook** (Solicitor) **$4,000; Rogers** (Surveyor) **$2,800; Hoard** (Doctor) **$2,200; Hart $2,000.** This wonderful opportunity heretofore enjoyed by only a limited number **now open to all—Hurrah!** Hundreds already getting rich. **You** can, too, why not? **Experience don't matter.** Allen's Bath Apparatus gives every home **a bathroom for $5.** Think of it! Energizes water, cleanses almost automatically, no plumbing. Could anything be more popular? It's irresistible. **Reese** saw 60 people—**sold 55,** result **$320.** "Sell 8 out of 10 houses," writes **Maroney.**

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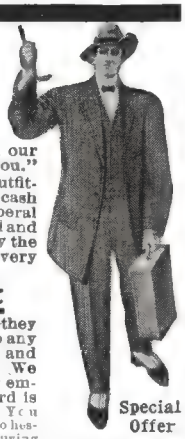

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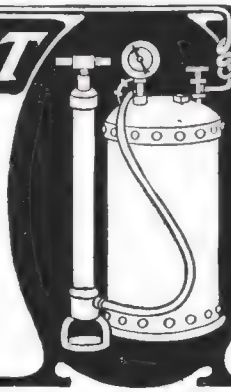

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Learn how easy it is to order clothes direct from the maker, saving all middleman's profits. See what a wide choice you get in this way—what stunning metropolitan styles. And see what you save—at least one-third under any dealer's prices.

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We send the garments on approval, guaranteeing style, fit, workmanship and price. If not satisfactory in every way the transaction will not cost you a penny.

Every fabric we use is all wool. Every style is up to the moment in fashion. Every garment is made by journeyman tailors in the best manner known to the craft.

Thousands of the best-dressed men in America are buying Clement clothes. They are getting three suits for the usual price of two. And they pay as convenient—a little each month.

Please send for our Style Book and samples and see if you don't want to join them. Simply give us your name and address. Cut out this ad as a reminder, so you won't forget. (3)

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The World's Masterpiece of watch manufacture—the Burlington Special—now sold direct to the public at its *rock-bottom, no-trust* price (and besides without middlemen's profits).

We do not care what it costs—we *will* uphold our independent line and so we are making the most sweeping, baffling offer ever made on watches.

Some trusts are legal and some are not. **We do not say that the watch trust is illegal;** but we do say that the **methods** of the giant factories in making "contracts" with dealers **to uphold double prices** on watches is very **unfair—unfair to us and unfair to you.** Hence our **direct offer in the Burlington at the very same price the Wholesale Jeweler must pay.**

This is *your* opportunity—NOW—while this great no-trust offer lasts—get the best watch made anywhere at one-third the price of other high-grade watches. Furthermore, in order to fight the Trust most effectually, we even allow terms of $2.50 a month on our finest watch—easiest possible payments at the rock-bottom price, the identical price the Wholesale jeweler must pay.

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Now do not miss this opportunity. At least we want you to know about WATCHES and WATCH PRICES. Write Today.

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The Favorite Clean-Up

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is a pure daintily fragrant toilet requisite with a hundred uses in every household. It is the best exponent of the principle that "Skin Cleanliness is skin health and the first aid to beauty."

Sold throughout North and South America, Europe, Egypt, India and the Orient. Jars, 35c up; Traveler's Tubes, 10c up. Be on your guard against imitations.

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Write and satisfy yourself of its unusual merit and the gratification afforded by its use.

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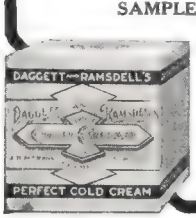

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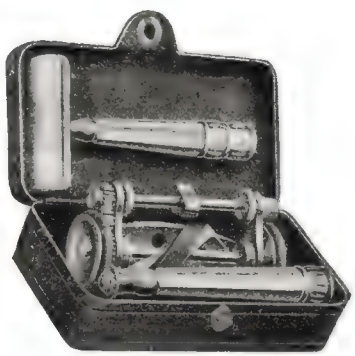

The Standard Kit contains a Spira-holder and a Spira-strop, both triple silver plated and six Spira-blades,—enough to last for six years,—all packed in a leather covered steel box, small enough to be carried in the pocket. Price complete $5.00, at drug and hardware dealers. Combination Kit contains Spira-holder, Spira-strop, six Spira-blades, brush and soap. Standard or Combination Kit may also be had in quadruple gold plate.

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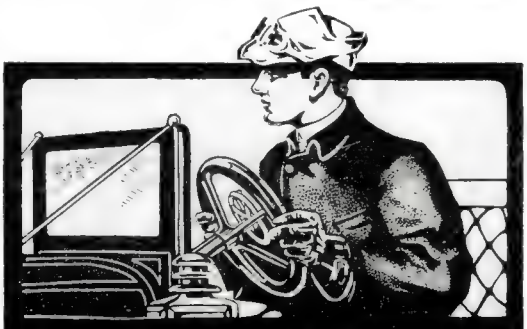

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This magnificent ostrich Boa, 1½ yards long, is made from first quality male bird feathers which give strength and brilliancy. These boas are well made, very durable and wear for years. For a light wrap combining beauty and utility has no equal. Absolutely best value on the market.

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This season's most fashionable Plume. Black only; $7.50. White or colors $1.00 extra.

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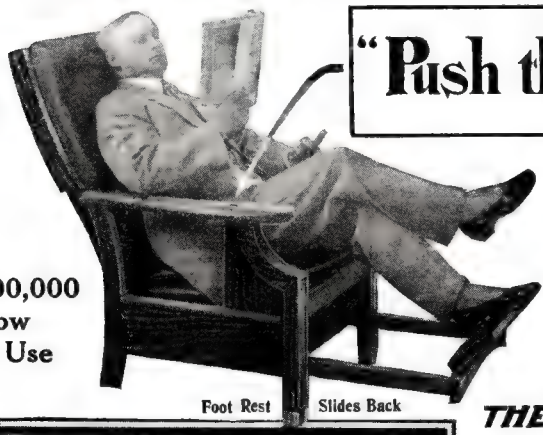

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ROYAL CHAIRS are so vastly superior to the common rod and rack Morris chairs there is no comparison. No other chair is so comfortable—so convenient. No rod to fall down—no getting up to adjust the back—you simply **push a button—and rest.** Back moves either up or down.

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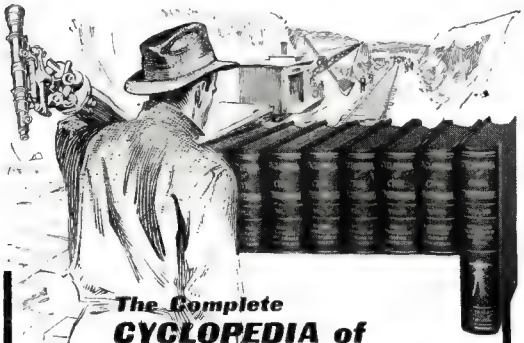

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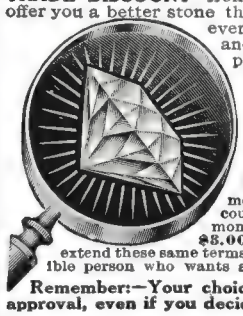

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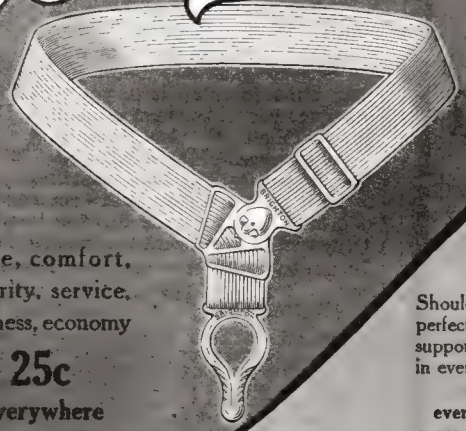

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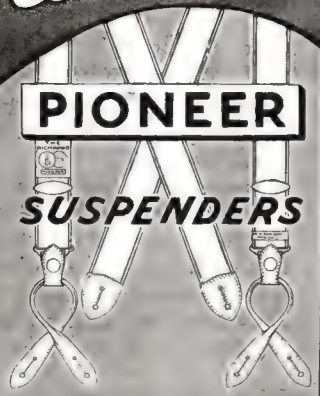

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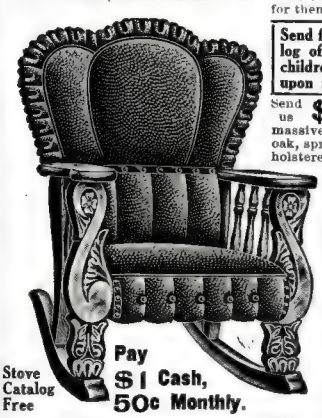

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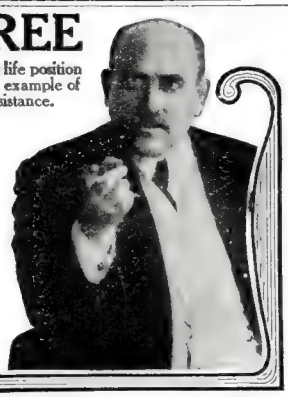

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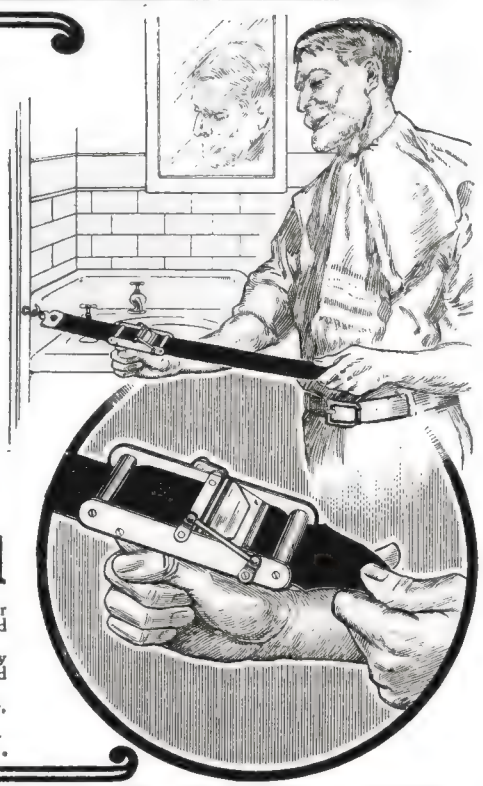

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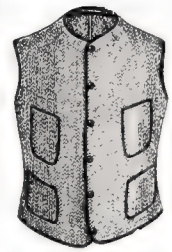
BEACH JACKET



Price $1.50

It is warmer than an overcoat, as cheap as a sweater, and wears like iron. While playing or working in wind or cold you will always be comfortable with a **Beach Jacket.**

It is made of a specially knit woolen cloth of handsome dark blue brown with gray stripes, is reinforced with specially prepared cold-proof lining, has strongest button fasteners, is braid-bound to prevent wearing. You can wear it over your vest and under your coat, or in place of an overcoat.

It is furnished, a vest without collar, at **$1.50**; a coat without collar, **$3.00**; a coat with collar, **$3.50.**

If your dealer cannot supply you, we will ship prepaid upon receipt of price.

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BEWARE OF IMITATIONS

OF THE FASTENERS

MEN SWEAR BY, NOT AT.

To be sure you are getting the genuine

WASHBURNE Pat. Imp. FASTENERS

(THE FASTENER WITH A BULLDOG GRIP)

look carefully for name ***Washburne stamped on every fastener.*** It is your protection against a ***poor infringement,*** the perpetrators of which are being prosecuted. The genuine Washburne Fasteners are ***"Little But Never Let Go."*** There is ***COMFORT FOR MEN*** in their use.

They are the greatest little utilities ever invented for men's dress, and are applied to

Key Chain and Ring, 25c
Scarf Holder, . . 10c
Bachelor Button, . 10c
Cuff Holders , . 20c
Drawers Supporters, 20c

Catalogue Free. Sold Everywhere. Sent Prepaid.

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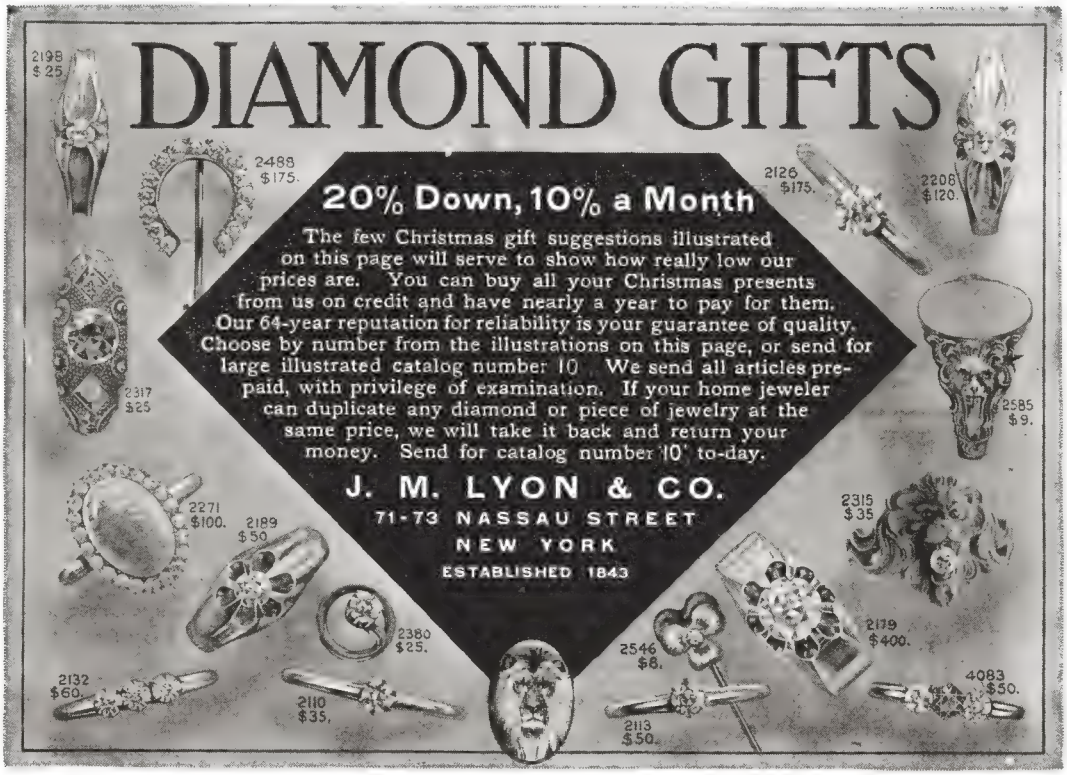

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Remember the name

Take them off or put them on *without fumbling* even when wearing heavy gloves. Always in an optically correct position.

Women prefer Shur-ons because they are neat and inconspicuous.

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The Styles have changed, but the *quality that made the name famous* has never varied. You can get other skates at a lower price, but you get more real value for your money in

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MAKERS OF ICE AND ROLLER SKATES
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We Teach by Mail how to mount **Birds, Animals, Game Heads, tan skins, make rugs,** and preserve all trophies. A delightful and fascinating art for men and women. Easily and quickly learned during spare time. **Decorate home and den with fine trophies,** or command big income selling mounted specimens and mounting for others. Skilled Taxidermists in great demand. *Success guaranteed or no tuition fee.* Endorsed by thousands of satisfied graduates. **Write today** for our Great Free Book **"How to Learn to Mount Birds and Animals."** Also our beautiful Taxidermy Magazine. **BOTH FREE.** Write today—do it now.

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makes low sounds and whispers plainly heard. Invisible, comfortable, weightless and harmless. Anyone can adjust it. Over one hundred thousand sold. Write for booklet and testimonials.

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and run it without the aid of batteries. Not a cheap magneto but the original high grade speed controlled friction driven dynamo. Perfectly insulated, **"water and dust-proof." Fully Guaranteed.** Operates the "make & break" and "jump spark." Charges all storage batteries for ignition and lighting on a small scale, perfectly with our special switch board in the circuit. Ten years actual service with over 36,000 Auto-sparkers in operation to testify to its merit.

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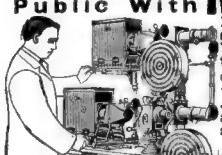

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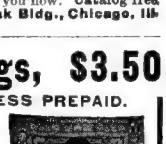

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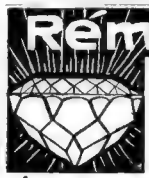

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They mend all leaks in all utensils—tin brass, copper, graniteware, hot water bags etc. No solder, cement or rivet. Any one can use them; fit any surface; two million in use. Send for sample pkg. 10c. **Complete pkg. assorted sizes, 25c postpaid. Agents wanted.**

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Burning common kerosene the ALADDIN MANTLE LAMP generates gas that gives a light more brilliant than city gas, gasoline or electricity. Simple, odorless, clean, safe and durable; is revolutionizing lighting everywhere.

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Needed in every home. Every lamp guaranteed. Sells itself. Ask our nearest office how you can get a lamp free or apply for agency proposition.

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Either style with any three letters or figures and one or two colors of enamel, **Sterling Silver, 25c each, $2.50 a doz.; Silver Plated, 10c each, $1.00 a doz.** Special designs in Pins or Badges made for any School or Society, at low prices. Send design for estimate. Catalogue free.

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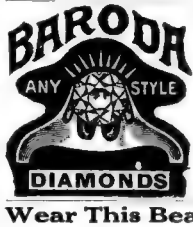

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Let us send you this beautiful, brilliant, sparkling ring in **Solid Gold Tiffany Setting** for a week's free wear before you need decide to keep it.

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Prove that at last a perfect substitute for African Diamonds has been found. Compare it with other diamonds, give it every test known, and then if you are satisfied that it is equal to a genuine $100 stone for every purpose and want to retain the ring under guarantee to keep its beautiful lustre for 10 years, have the price $9.00 sent to us. Isn't this a fair offer?

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Brass-Craft is the most popular and valuable Art of the time, and with our stamped articles and simple instructions, materials costing only a trifle can quickly be worked up into articles **worth many dollars.**

Let us send you this Complete outfit consisting of **1 Stippling and Veining Tool, 1 package Polishing Powder, 1 package Coloring Powder, 1 Fine Sandpaper, 1 piece Polishing Plush, and complete material for Handsome Brass-Craft Calendar** (see illustration) as follows: **1 Brass Panel, 1 Wood Panel, 50 Round-Head Brass Tacks, 1 Brass Hanger, 1 Calendar Pad. Furnished with stamped design and full directions for making Calendar worth $1.00**—all in neat box, **FREE** and **prepaid,** to anyone sending us 25 cents to pay cost of packing, shipping, etc.

Ask for FREE CATALOG S 64

Illustrates hundreds of articles in **Brass-Craft** for use, ornament or profit. The above outfit offer is made for a **limited time only** to quickly introduce our splendid line of **Brass-Craft goods** and distribute our **New Catalog. Write today.**

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"America's Fur Authorities"

Highest Quality Makers' Prices — **Latest Styles Satisfaction Guaranteed**

We save you money on anything in furs. We sell direct by mail and guarantee the greatest values, latest styles and best fitting garments for the money. Beautiful Muffs from $3.00 up. Neckpieces from $3.00 up, and Fur Coats from $23.85 up to $1400 in stock.

This handsome, stylish soft and glossy Black Opp-Marten Russian Neckpiece and Muff—a regular $17.25 value only **$11.85**

Neckpiece with round effect in back and wide over shoulder, trimmed with four large bushy 9 inch tails and lined with Skinner's satin— Special Price - - **$5.75**

Muff to match is extra large pillow design, 16 in. wide at top, 12 in. deep — Special Price **$6.90**

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FREE Our 1909-1910 Style Book and Catalogue shows latest fur styles with prices. It contains valuable information on care and selection of furs. Write today and mention edition Y 11. It's *FREE.* (Established 1873.)

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Remarkable Offer! Don't Miss It!

We will send it to you absolutely **FREE** prepaid, to introduce our genuine Mexican Diamonds. These Diamonds exactly resemble finest genuine blue-white Diamonds, stand acid tests, are cut by experts, brilliancy guaranteed permanent, and yet we sell at 1-10 the cost. Best people wear them.

SPECIAL OFFER—For 50c deposit, as guarantee of good faith, we send on approval, registered, either ½ or 1 carat Mexican Diamond at special price. Money back if desired.

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Perfect Pencil Points in a Jiffy

The Handy Pencil Sharpener

SIMPLE, convenient, efficient; adapted to large or small office, homes and schools. Sharpens rapidly and evenly without breaking points. *Does away with the old-fashioned, unsatisfactory method, and guarantees good pencil points for a lifetime.* Legs rubber-tipped. Weighs 11 ounces. The only practical, low-priced sharpener made. Enameled, $1.00; Nickel-plated, $1.25. At your dealers; if not, we will send, postpaid, at price named.

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We Have Solved for You the Underwear Problem

By means of machines we make for ourselves (patented in nine countries) we knit a perfectly elastic fabric that stretches to conform to every motion of the body, and yet returns to its own shape when the pull ceases.

It is made to fit closely to the figure without compressing it. Then, to give extra strength, there are silk-tape pieces sewn on to prevent undue strain at the points of most stress. This gives you a suit that will hold its shape and elasticity against either wear or reasonable care in laundry. The fabric is unequalled for its gratefulness to the skin.

We beg you to make the closest comparison with any other make, and then to give your patronage accordingly.

Of course we have the full varieties of sizes, weights, colors, etc.

We ask you, however, to identify the genuine "COOPER" goods by

This COOPER'S TRADE MARK DERBY RIBBED REG. U.S. PAT. OFF UNDERWEAR GRADE DE LUXE Trade Mark

which is on them all.

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Manufactured only by the

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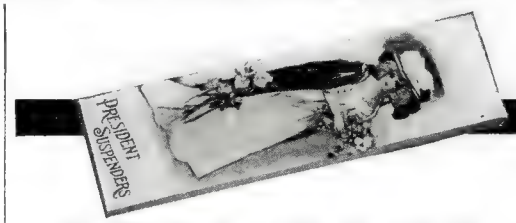

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In Artistic Holiday Boxes

Of exceptionally striking design—from the hand of a master artist. Your choice of three dainty subjects: "Fair Rosamond," "Bachelor Girl," or "Lady in Yellow."

No other gift can equal this in value, beauty and usefulness. Always appreciated by men, President Suspenders are doubly valued in these daintily colored, artistic boxes. Light or medium weights. Extra lengths for tall men. Guaranteed by makers. Buy now. **At all dealers. Or order from us. We mail direct if you wish. Send addresses. We enclose presentation cards if desired.**

Price 50 Cents

Our 1910 calendar has all these beautiful box cover designs without advertising, and Poinsettia Flower cover panel. Ready Nov. 15th. Send for it—25c.

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$1.95 for this genuine 17-in. Ostrich Plume

made of the highest grade hard flue ostrich, selected from the male bird. Has a very glossy fiber and is extra wide, with heavy drooping head. **Let us send you this Plume on approval.**

This magnificent French Curl Ostrich Plume is full 17-inch in length.

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SPECIAL Full 18-inch Ostrich Plume Black and Colors **$2.28**

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HEATHERBLOOM
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PETTICOATS

EVERY PETTICOAT GUARANTEED

are the equal of silk in matters of appearance, brilliancy, richness and rustle, and vastly silk's superior in durability, for Heatherbloom thrice outwears silk, yet costs but a third as much.

New shades, solid colors, popular stripes and fancies. Workmanship alone determines price—$2.00 and upward.

If you have any difficulty in securing a Heatherbloom Taffeta Petticoat in the style and color you want, write us and we will see that you are supplied.

WARNING—IMPORTANT

The great popularity achieved by Heatherbloom Petticoats has led to widespread imitation. Do not accept as genuine a petticoat claimed to be "as good as," "better than," "the same as" Heatherbloom. Such statements are *false*, for every genuine Heatherbloom Taffeta Petticoat bears this label

Facsimile

of label

sewn lengthwise inside the waistband. Look for it. REFUSE Petticoats that do not have a full and complete label. Don't take anyone's word for it—*see the label yourself.*

HEATHERBLOOM by the Yard, 40 cents
And Every Yard Guaranteed

Be sure that you see "Heatherbloom" on every yard. It is your guarantee of the premier fabric for petticoats, foundations, drop skirts and for all lining purposes. At lining counters—150 shades—36 inches wide.

Write for series of souvenir post cards—FREE.

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Not the Last Chance

But a Good Chance

To Try This Much Talked of

Barrington Hall
The Baker-ized Steel-Cut Coffee

Imagine, if you can, a delicious coffee costing no more than any good coffee, but one that you can drink to your heart's content without fear of ill effect. Such is Barrington Hall.

Just how Barrington Hall differs from other coffees is fully explained in our booklet sent free on request. See coupon.

Our own particular methods are used in selecting the raw coffee, in cleaning, blending and roasting it, in steel-cutting it and in taking out the bitter skin that detracts so much from the flavor and wholesomeness of coffee.

Manufacturers heretofore have not thought such care in preparation necessary. Our Coffee is in a class by itself, therefore, and best distinguished as "Baker-ized Coffee."

The Coffee without a regret

IN addition to Barrington Hall, which is of medium strength, we now offer a stronger coffee (Valoro Baker-ized) and a milder (Siesta Baker-ized). Both of the same high quality and prepared in the same way as Barrington Hall, but of distinctly different flavor.

For sale in all cities and most towns. Price, any flavor, 35c to 40c per pound, according to locality. In sealed tins only.

Special Trial Offer

If your grocer cannot supply you, send us his name and we will send you free, enough Barrington Hall to make six cups of delicious coffee. See coupon. If you wish to try all three flavors of Baker-ized Coffee and find out what flavor suits you best, send for a "Find-Out" package. It contains over ¼ pound each of Barrington Hall, of Valoro, and of Siesta in separate cans. This trial order, nearly a pound of these splendid coffees, delivered at your door for 30c, stamps or coin, and your grocer's name.

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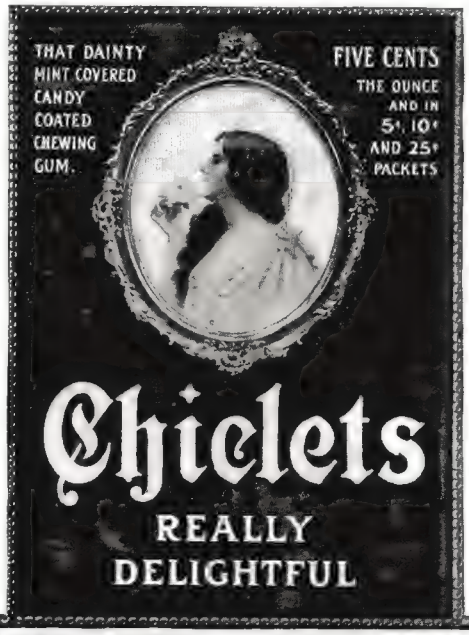
235 N. 2d Street,
Minneapolis, Minn.
123 Hudson Street,
New York, N. Y.

Please send me free sample can of Barrington Hall Coffee and booklet. In consideration I give my grocer's name (on the margin).

My own is.....



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Try Them! If you can't buy **Chiclets** in your neighborhood, send us ten cents for a sample packet. Any jobber will supply storekeepers with **Chiclets.**

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Just sit down and tell the story as it happened—as though you were telling it to a smoking compartment full of good fellows and had them "all ears" to catch every word.

Somewhere, sometime, there has been something in your life worth telling about. Even the humble engine-wiper can spin some yarn about the rail.

We want just such stories—true ones, with names, dates and places, and running from 1,000 to 3,000 words in length. Checks will be mailed immediately upon acceptance.

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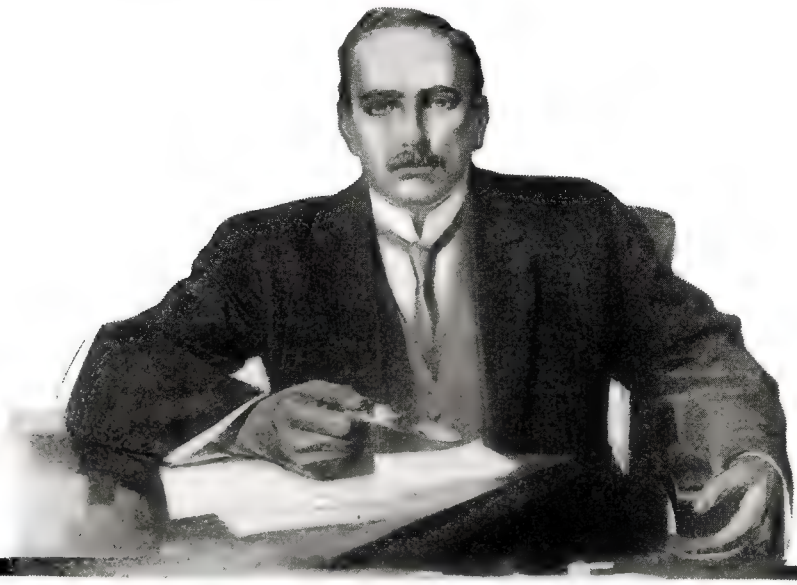
175 Fifth Avenue, New York City



The Successful Man

¶ There was a time when men just happened to be successful. Opportunity came their way and took them along with it.

¶ Times have changed. Now-a-days, success is not an accident; it is a result.

¶ Business and Engineering enterprises have become so complex that corporations must have experts to handle them — trained men must be at the head of every department.

¶ Are you working toward the head in your chosen occupation? Are you getting the training that will entitle you to the management of your department when the opportunity arrives?

¶ The American School, with its thirteen years of experience, with its modern and thorough system of teaching by mail, will qualify you in the higher branches of either business or engineering professions—will give you the training that will enable you to force your way to success.

¶ Don't be an average man at an average salary. Get into the class of successful men.

¶ If you will fill in and mail the coupon, we will tell you how you can realize your ambitions.

¶ The coupon will bring complete information by mail — not an agent. We do not employ representatives or collectors.

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....Systematizer	....Mechanical Engineer
....Cert'f'd Public Acc'nt	....Sanitary Engineer
....Auditor	....Steam Engineer
....Business Manager	....Fire Insurance Eng'r
....Commercial Law	....College Preparatory

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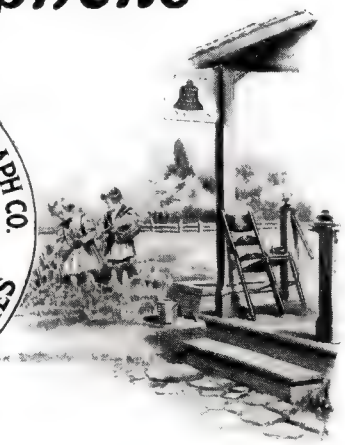
ARGOSY, 11-'09. Bus.

The Comfort of the Telephone



AMERICAN TELEPHONE & TELEGRAPH CO. AND ASSOCIATED COMPANIES — BELL SYSTEM — LOCAL AND LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE

The Bell System has become the *nervous system* of the business and social world.

The comfort it affords the women in the homes of America cannot be measured.

Do you measure it in considering the value of your Bell telephone?

The mother of children can find out where they are at any particular hour of the day—*and how they are*—even though their visits carry them to the country village or the city hundreds of miles away.

The husband on a trip talks from his hotel room to his wife at home.

There is a world of comfort in the *knowledge that you can talk together* at a moment's notice, wherever you may be.

The Bell telephone has a special value because it is everywhere—because at sight you feel a familiar acquaintance with a Bell instrument or a Bell sign.

There are over 4,000,000 Bell stations. You cannot use them all, but from time to time you have a real vital need for one. Which one you cannot foretell.

There are six billion calls over the telephones of the Bell System every year.

Many of these are comforting calls from afar, calls whose actual money value can no more be reckoned than the value of the happiness which one man has and another man cannot buy.

The *very existence* of the Bell telephone service has its value to you, even at moments when you are not using it.

The Bell Long Distance service offers, ready recruited for your call, the largest body of active business men in the world. If you have a telephone, avail yourself of its long distance possibilities.

The highest type of public service can be achieved *only by one policy, one system, universal service.*

The American Telephone and Telegraph Company
And Associated Companies

Every Bell Telephone Is the Center of the System

Get Our Book of Bargains

Select Whatever You Want in it—Take a Year to Pay

We have just issued a mammoth book, picturing 3,000 new style things for the home. **Your** copy is waiting. Ask us to send it—**FREE.**

This book shows an endless variety of everything any home needs. And every article has been purchased by us, in one way or another, at remarkable prices. Everything is sold at actual cost, plus our one small profit. Everything is sent on 30 days' free trial. And everything is sold on credit. Don't make the mistake of buying things for your home before you see this book. Write for a copy now.

E-2490 Mutual Empire Steel Range

Six-inch covers. Blue steel body, asbestos lined; 14-inch oven; high closet; porcelain-lined reservoir. **$3** first payment, $1.50 monthly payments; total price, $21.95.

K-7715—Luxurious Turkish Rocker. Upholstered spring seat and back tufted and ruffled. Guaranteed fabricord leather. Very large. **$1.50** first payment, 75 cents month; total, $10.95.

M-5742—Kitchen Cabinet. Seasoned hardwood, oak front; 65 inches high; base 44x26 inches. **$1.50** first payment, 75 cents monthly payments; total price, $8.75. (13)

Factory Cash Prices

We buy up whole factory outputs to get prices which none can compete with. For there are 500,000 homes which buy their furnishings from us. Our output is far larger than the combined output of all other concerns in our line. Our buildings for storing and shipping these goods cover six acres of ground. Our combined capital is $7,000,000.

Such buying power enables us to underbuy everyone else. Then we add to our cost just our one small margin of profit. And we sell on credit exactly as low as for cash. No other concern in America does that.

So we guarantee a saving of 15 to 50 per cent under any prices quoted by catalog houses or dealers. If we don't save you that much, we expect and invite you to return the articles to us.

3,000 Things for the home

At Factory Cash Prices

On Credit

Furniture	Silverware
Carpets	Chinaware
Rugs	Graphophones
Draperies	Washing Machines
Stoves	Sewing Machines
Ranges	Baby Cabs
Pianos	Lamps and Clocks

30 Days' Trial

M-8417—Brussels Rug 9x12 feet. Green background; red and pink roses; highest grade. **$2.25** first payment, $1.00 monthly payments; total price, $14.65.

Long-Time Credit

We will sell to you on credit without any red tape or publicity—on our open account credit plan. No interest, no security. You may have from 8 to 14 months to pay.

You pay a convenient amount each month while you use the goods and enjoy them. That is the plan on which nearly all house furnishings are sold to city people. Almost nobody pays cash down. We bring to you, wherever you are, these modern credit conveniences. Yet we sell you at prices which stores cannot possibly quote—often below what they pay.

Sent on Approval

Whatever you select from this mammoth book will be sent to you on approval. You may keep the article 30 days before even deciding to buy. If you are not satisfied in every way—with prices, style and quality—you may send the article back. We will pay freight both ways on it and return your first payment in full.

In this way we offer you absolute protection. You have a whole month to judge the article before you decide to keep it. This applies to everything we handle—to 3,000 things for the home.

Four Free Catalogs

Our General Catalog pictures and describes over 3,000 new-style things for the home. It contains furniture of all kinds, rugs, carpets, draperies, and a full line of household goods except stoves.

Our Stove Catalog shows 70 styles of Empire stoves and ranges, costing from 89c up. These stoves are the famous fuel savers, and they pay for themselves in short order.

Our Piano Catalog shows all styles of the Beckman Pianos, at $100 to $150 below regular prices.

Our Graphophone Catalog shows Columbia Graphophones and records, all sold on credit.

Mark on this coupon the catalog you want, and mail it to us today. Do this now, before you forget. Then see what you get.

Cut Out This Coupon

SPIEGEL, MAY, STERN CO.,
957 35th Street, Chicago

Mail me your _____ catalog.

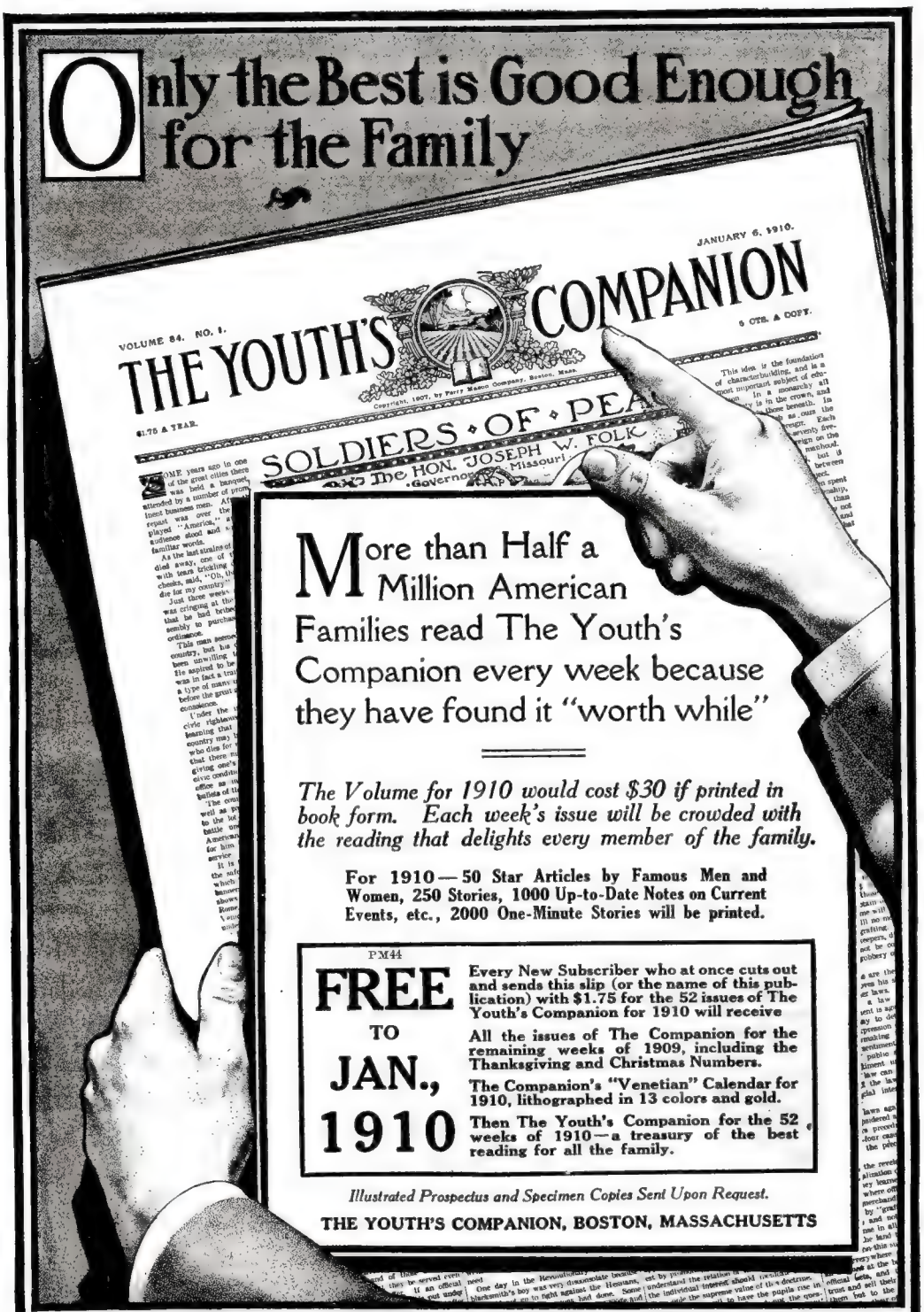
Name _____

Postoffice _____

State _____

Spiegel, May, Stern Co., 957 35th Street, Chicago

Only the Best is Good Enough for the Family



More than Half a Million American Families read The Youth's Companion every week because they have found it "worth while"

The Volume for 1910 would cost $30 if printed in book form. Each week's issue will be crowded with the reading that delights every member of the family.

For 1910—50 Star Articles by Famous Men and Women, 250 Stories, 1000 Up-to-Date Notes on Current Events, etc., 2000 One-Minute Stories will be printed.

PM44

FREE TO JAN., 1910

Every New Subscriber who at once cuts out and sends this slip (or the name of this publication) with $1.75 for the 52 issues of The Youth's Companion for 1910 will receive

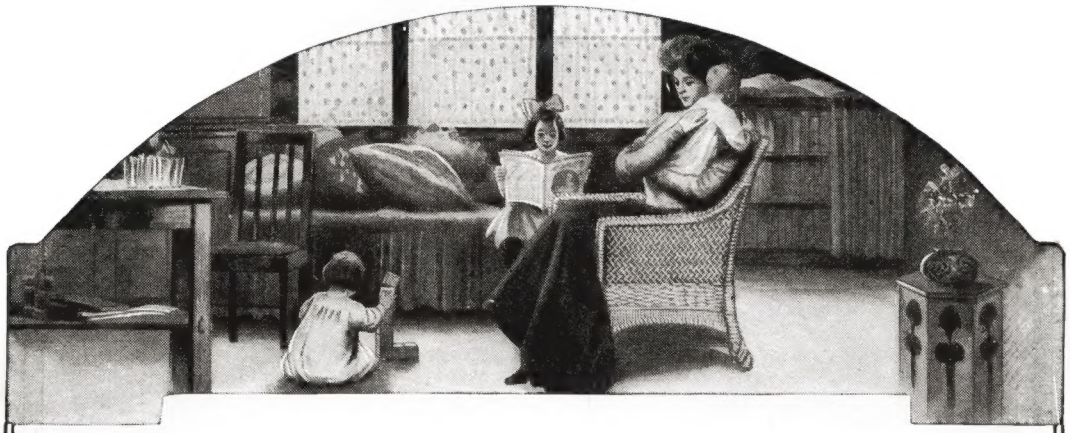
All the issues of The Companion for the remaining weeks of 1909, including the Thanksgiving and Christmas Numbers.

The Companion's "Venetian" Calendar for 1910, lithographed in 13 colors and gold.

Then The Youth's Companion for the 52 weeks of 1910—a treasury of the best reading for all the family.

Illustrated Prospectus and Specimen Copies Sent Upon Request.

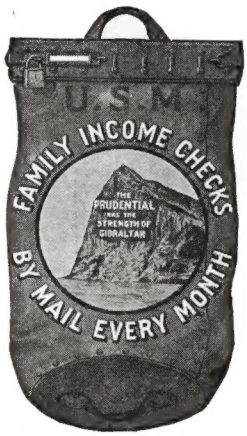
THE YOUTH'S COMPANION, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



Leave Your Wife a Fixed Monthly Income for Life

The Prudential

Newest Monthly Income Policy



Provides a Cash Payment at death of Insured AND THEN a regular MONTHLY INCOME for your wife for 20 years or for life.

Cost is Low.

Write now for Particulars and cost for you. Address Dept. 98. Give your age and age of Beneficiary.

The Prudential Insurance Company of America

Incorporated as a Stock Company by the State of New Jersey

JOHN F. DRYDEN, President **Home Office, NEWARK, N. J.**

King C Gillette

TRADE Gillette MARK

Don't Say "Please" to Your Razor

YOU want a razor that you don't have to coax—a razor that you don't have to fuss with or worry over or *"put in condition"* to use.

You want a razor that "is on the job" the minute you pick it up.

You don't have to say *please* to your comb and brush—your wash-basin and your towel—you simply *use* them.

Shaving, to be sure, is a finer operation—but you should be able to shave without thinking much about it.

You *can* if you buy a Gillette.

The average Gillette user can shave in three minutes and read the headlines in the morning paper—and by the average user we do not mean a man here and there but all sorts of men, with all sorts of beards, in all parts of the world—three million of them.

The time to buy a Gillette is now.

It pays for itself in three months. It costs $5.00—and it lasts a lifetime.

No stropping—no honing.

The Gillette, illustrated herewith, is so compact that it can be carried in the pocket or slipped in the side of a traveling bag. It comes in gold, silver or gun metal—with handle and blade box to match. *The blades are fine.*

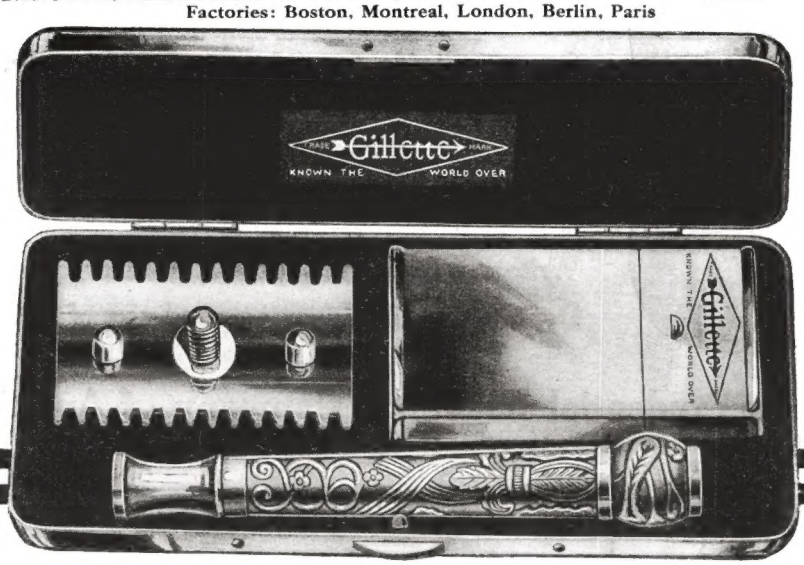
Prices, $5.00 to $7.50. For sale everywhere.

New York, Times Bldg.
Chicago, Stock Exchange Bldg.
London Office, 17 Holborn Viaduct

GILLETTE SALES CO.
554 Kimball Building, Boston

Canadian Office
63 St. Alexander St.
Montreal

Factories: Boston, Montreal, London, Berlin, Paris



The Oliver Typewriter

Price $100—Terms

"He that buys with pennies maintains not only himself but other people. Save and have. Every little makes a muckle."
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, in Poor Richard's Almanack.

The Oliver Typewriter's "Seventeen Cents a Day" Selling Plan **vitalizes** the whole philosophy of **Thrift,** by presenting a powerful **incentive** to save for a worthy, **definite purpose.**

Franklin was **right,** and his words ring true to the needs of the present hour.

And this wonderful "Penny Plan" appeals today with irresistible force to multiply thousands of buyers.

It brings the world's best $100 typewriter within universal reach. A machine whose perfections have won it **first place** in the field of mechanical writing. One whose splendid achievements, within the span of a decade, have blazoned the name of **"OLIVER"** on the very heights of Fame.

The spark of inspiration struck from the sayings of Franklin has kindled a flame of typewriter enthusiasm throughout the entire world. It has extended the Oliver's dominions beyond the **Commercial** horizon and **into the Homes of the people everywhere.**

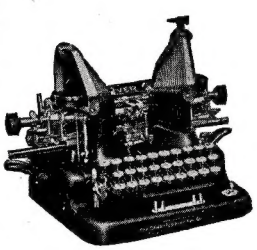
Just a small first payment—then at the rate of Seventeen cents a day until the machine is **yours.**

That's all there is to this simple, sensible plan.

Why not write us about it?

Seventeen Cents a Day

The Oliver Typewriter blazed the trail for all "visible writing" machines. It has introduced, in rapid succession, a remarkable series of innovations, each one of commanding importance. It has the Automatic Line Ruling Device for filling in all kinds of ruled forms
—The Disappearing Indicator, showing exact printing point
—The permanently Aligning Type Bar
—The Automatic Line Spacer
—The Infinitely Rapid Escapement
—Instantly Adjustable Marginal Devices
—Back Spacer
—Tabulator
—Interchangeable Carriage
—Universal Keyboard
—84 characters with but 28 keys
—Writes in Colors **without** changing Ribbons
—Practical Paper Feed, **never failing,** which feeds a small label or the widest document with equal ease
—It is supreme in manifolding
—It has non-puncturable Rollers.



All this wealth of improved devices, all this added efficiency, make the Oliver Typewriter worth more than the price we ask. Yet $100—paid on the "Penny Plan"—will make you its owner.

An Opportunity for Hustlers

We are willing to entertain applications from capable men for Local Agencies for the Oliver Typewriter in territories not now taken. Write at once, stating qualifications.

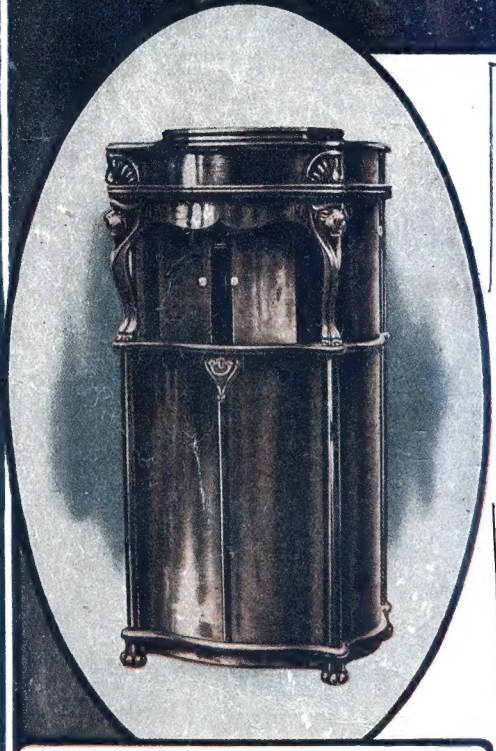
(4)

The Oliver Typewriter Company
45 Oliver Typewriter Building, Chicago

COLUMBIA

CONSTANTINO
The Great Spanish Tenor
Sings exclusively for the Columbia

10-inch Double-Disc Records	$1.50
12-inch Double-Disc Records	$2.50



THE COLUMBIA
GRAFONOLA
DE LUXE - $200.00
(WITH REGINA ATTACHMENT $225.00)

Double-Disc Records
65c.

Played on your own machine, no matter whether it's a Columbia or not, Columbia Double-Disc Records will give you better music and longer service. Get *Columbia* Double-Discs. Don't take "no" for an answer. We can give you the address of a nearby dealer; or send us 65 cents and we will send you a sample record, postage free, with a catalog.

There are "concealed-horn" talking-machines on the market already. If you will make just one comparison you will own a Grafonola. You can make this comparison by stepping into any store where Columbia Records are carried in stock—or you can do it fairly well by mail. We have an advance catalog ready for you.

Columbia Phonograph Company, Gen'l
Dept. O 11, Tribune Building, New York
Manufacturers of Disc and Cylinder Graphophones, $20 to $200—Double-Disc and Indestructible Cylinder Records. Dealers everywhere.
Headquarters for Canada—40 Melinda Street, Toronto, Ont.
Dealers Wanted. Exclusive selling rights given where we are not properly represented.

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